

THE UK'S NO.1 MULTIFORMAT GAMES MAG

GAMESMASTER



PREVIEW BLOW-OUT

PLAYSTATION SPECIAL!

» Including our first hands-on with Uncharted 4

PRESENTING THE GAMESMASTER

WIN!
A SUPER RARE
FALLOUT 4
XBOX ONE



2015 AWARDS

THE MUST-OWN TITLES OF THE LAST 12 MONTHS
PLUS OUR GAME OF THE YEAR!



FORCE-FUL REVIEW!

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

» Is it the best game in the galaxy?

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

» Hang with Lara in our in-depth review!

15

NEW GAMES SCORED!

MARIO & LUIGI:
PAPER JAM
ASSASSIN'S CREED
SYNDICATE
CALL OF DUTY:
BLACK OPS III



From Just **£4.50** p/week

That's the equivalent to:



A PINT
OF BEER



A STEAK
PIE



1/3 OF A
CINEMA TICKET



A MAGAZINE



A FAST FOOD
MEAL



1/2 A CD



“This month sees four new contenders for the ultimate award”

Our illustrious GamesMaster Game Of The Year Awards feature is here and, let me tell you, it was a tough one to pull together. I'm not just talking about the last 12 months of incredible gaming we had to siphon into a bandolier of brilliance over on p42 either...

This month sees the fresh arrival of not one, not two, not three, but four contenders for the ultimate gaming gong. Our intrepid team of reviewers has pulled out all the stops to bring you verdicts on some ludicrously great games. Fallout 4, Star Wars Battlefront, Rise Of The Tomb Raider... all get scored this issue.

We've also played plenty of corkers on the horizon for 2016, including Uncharted 4 and the increasingly impressive Overwatch, which scratches every online shooter itch going.

Enjoy your GM!

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman - Editor



GET MORE FROM YOUR GM!



Online at www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster



...or subscribe. See p92 for details.

EDITOR'S CHOICE MY TOP PICKS THIS ISSUE



28

Overwatch is coming to consoles! PS4 and XO owners: discover why this is one you need to watch.



42

Blood, sweat, tears, and hair were spilled in the construction of this epic rundown of 2015's finest.



70

Long time readers will know of my affinity for all things Tomb Raider-shaped. All rise for Lara!

COVER STORY

Only the best games are featured on GM's cover!

2015 AWARDS

42 GAME OF THE YEAR 2015

With Christmas fast approaching, we've taken stock of a stellar 12 months in gaming. After some quiet contemplation followed by some less quiet fisticuffs, we've emerged with our definitive 30 best games of the year.

Contents

What's In Your Latest Issue?

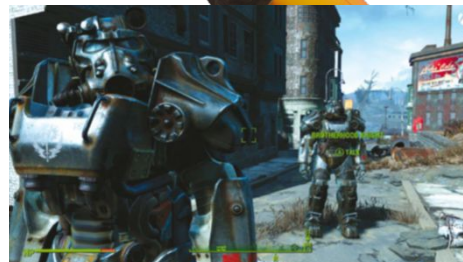


28 OVERWATCH

We've sampled every hero and naturally dominated every matchup in this exciting, eccentric, energetic new multiplayer FPS. Check out our full impressions of Blizzard's Next Big Thing.

60 FALLOUT 4

We risked radiation poisoning roaming the Commonwealth wastes to bring you this verdict-shaped atomic bombshell. But is it a glowing (literally) review? Head further into the GM vault to find out.



GM Previews

25 UNCHARTED 4

We dig in to the mystical multiplayer of Drake's latest exotic excursion, and see if we can find treasure.

26 HORIZON: ZERO DAWN

Ok, we love dinosaurs, sure, and of course we love robots. But can a combo of the two really work? (Yes.)

27 NO MAN'S SKY

Dig out your space safari suit and join us for a romp through procedurally generated alien worlds.

32 WILD

Possess a rabbit! Ride a bear! Be an eagle! Meet a snake goddess! Sometimes videogames are weird.

36 HITMAN

We touch base with our baldie bestie for a spot of fugu and weird-tasting tea. Ooh er, we suddenly feel funny...

GM Reviews

64 ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE

A review written entirely in cockney rhyming slang! (Not really.)

66 CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS III

Should you pop down to the shops for CODBLOPS? Is it the tops, or a flop? Ok, ok, we'll... stop.

70 RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

Lara gets in the Christmas spirit in the winter wonderland of deepest Siberia.

72 XENOBLADE CHRONICLES X

We climb into our rocket-powered mech and jet off to space to explore the biggest world on Wii U.

76 STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

Unsure whether to Leia out the cash for this Star Wars FPS, or wait for something Fett-er? Let us lend a Han.

GM Regulars

06 FANBASE

We highlight the very best of your tweets, emails, letters, telegrams, and gaming-related smoke signals.

10 UPFRONT

We've got the lowdown on the PlayStation 4 exclusives that'll make 2016 a year to remember.

54 INDIEMASTER

Say hello to our roguish vulpine pal Reynardo, star of indie adventure Stories: The Path Of Destinies.

84 RETROMASTER

We've come over all patriotic, counting down the best Brit heroes, and looking back on Lara Croft's first outing.

88 CULTUREMASTER

GM gets crafty with top tips on how to turn humble Hama Beads into your favourite gaming icons.

Team GM

Meet The Magazine's Makers!



Future plc, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA
Tel 01225 442244 Fax 01225 732275 Email gamesmaster@futurenet.com
Web www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster

EDITORIAL

Editor Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman
Production Editor Robin Valentine
Art Editor Sam Freeman

CONTRIBUTORS

Louise Blain, Nathan Brown, Katharine Byrne, Matthew Castle, Matt Clapham, Matt Elliott, Ben Griffin, Andy Hartup, Leon Hurley, Alex Jones, Leigh Loveday, Ben Maxwell, David Meikleham, James Nouch, Chris Schilling, Jen Simpkins, Joe Skrebels, Ben Wilson, Iain Wilson

ADVERTISING

Commercial Sales Director Clare Dove
Advertising Director Andrew Church
Advertising Manager Michael Pyatt
Account Manager Steven Pyatt
For advertising enquiries please contact Michael Pyatt, michael.pyatt@futurenet.com

MARKETING

Group Marketing Manager Laura Driffield
Marketing Manager Kristianne Stanton

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION

Production Controller Fran Twentyman
Production Manager Mark Constance
Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future
Distributed by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT, Tel: 0207 429 4000
Overseas distribution by Seymour International

CIRCULATION

Trade Marketing Manager Juliette Winyard - 07551 150 984

SUBSCRIPTIONS

UK reader order line & enquiries 0844 848 2852
Overseas reader order line & enquiries +44 (0)1604 251045
Online enquiries www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk
Email gamesmaster@myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

LICENSING

International Director Regina Erak, regina.erak@futurenet.com
+44 (0)1225 442244 Fax +44 (0)1225 732275

MANAGEMENT

Content & Marketing Director Charlie Speight
Head of Content & Marketing, Film, Music & Games Declan Gough
Group Editor-in-Chief Daniel Dawkins
Group Art Director Graham Dalzell
Deputy Group Art Director Mark Wynne

FUTURE PUBLISHING

Head of Content and Marketing Nial Ferguson
Head of Games, Film and Music Declan Gough
UK CEO Zillah Byng-Thorne

Next issue on sale 29 December 2015



A member of the Audit
Bureau of Circulations
12,849
Jan-Dec 2014

Want to work for Future?
Visit www.futurenet.com/jobs



Future is an award-winning international media group and leading digital business. We reach more than 49 million international consumers a month and create world-class content and advertising solutions for passionate consumers online, on tablet & smartphone and in print.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR). www.futureplc.com

Chief executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
Chief financial officer Richard Haley

Tel +44 (0)207 042 4000 (London)
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244 (Bath)

© Future Publishing Limited 2015. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used or reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. The registered office of Future Publishing Limited is at Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA. All information contained in this magazine is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. Readers are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this magazine. If you submit unsolicited material to us, you automatically grant Future a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in all editions of the magazine, including licensed editions worldwide and in any physical or digital format throughout the world. Any material you submit is sent at your risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents or subcontractors shall be liable for loss or damage.

Future Games: The First Choice For Gamers. This magazine is brought to you by Future Publishing Ltd, the makers of Edge, PC Gamer, Official Xbox Magazine and Official PlayStation Magazine.



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.



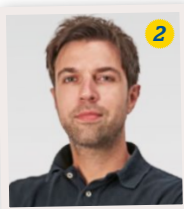
MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM TEAM GM!

Even as snow begins to fall (possibly) and regrettably pap Chrimbo tunes begin to assault your senses (almost certainly), Team GM is here to deliver a helping of gaming cheer. See you in the New Year!



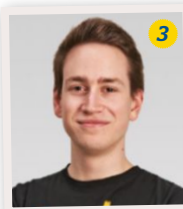
Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman

Our editor almost started a riot in the office this ish when he came in one morning and declared Life Is Strange "utter rubbish". Things have quieted down a little now, but Robin's been secretly plotting against Matt ever since. [Er, what? -Ed]



Sam Freeman

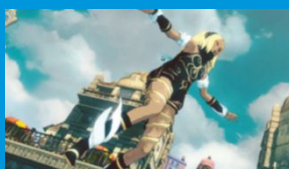
The Gandalf of Photoshopped wizardry has been working on a presumably Ryu-inspired covering of facial ruffage. Wait a minute... Beard? Propensity to quaff sherry and mince pies? Drives a reindeer sled to work? Something's going on here...



Robin Valentine

"Can we just remove my jowls?" This unusual request doesn't get uttered every week, but our dedicated Prod Ed wasn't about to let his reader-professed 'explosive handsomeness' be diminished. See p97 for the results. Tee-hee!

The BIG GAME finder



Gravity Rush 2

Preview - P27



Street Fighter V

Preview - P39



Tekken 7

Preview - P35



Need For Speed

Review - P69



Dark Souls III

Preview - P38



Guitar Hero Live

Review - P78



Dying Light's story was admittedly total bum fluff - but we've seen plenty of great videogame narratives lately too.

CONTACT US

Email gamesmaster@future.net

Twitter www.twitter.com/gamesmaster

Facebook www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster

Web www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster

Post GamesMaster, Future, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1AU, UK

Extra-dimensional

Paying more to play a game you already bought has become the norm for most gamers. Extra levels, characters... beards. Usually I don't mind it, when it's just an option, but Lego Dimensions makes me feel awful while I play, showing constant in-game adverts for all its add-ons - and it's a parent's nightmare. It's a shame that this money-grabbing attitude to game design is becoming more and more popular. I for one will not be caught up in the hype any longer - even with Ghostbusters Lego coming out...

Stuart Gregory, email

We almost fell out of our chairs when we first saw how much it costs to get everything in Lego Dimensions - over £300! Of course, you do get real toys with your DLC there, but it still feels like way too much. It's a fine line for studios to walk - the reality is, often they need to sell you extra content just to justify their costs, but when they take it too far, customers rightly feel exploited. Warner Bros is a repeat offender at this point - MKX, for example, was riddled with annoying microtransactions - so we're hoping it cleans up its act soon.

Direct hit

Firstly, may I just say that I think your magazine is not only fantastic to read but fair in its opinions!

After many years of playing action/sci-fi shooters/sandbox/superhero games I have noticed a genre that is very overlooked - film-making games! I have a game called The Movies that came out in 2005 - I still play it, and wonder what a modern version would be like.

Daniel Cilmo, Facebook

Flattery will get you everywhere, Daniel! That is a very specific genre (we're not sure we can think of any other examples of it, in fact), but it'd certainly be interesting to see a modern comeback. It seems like the right time - games that allow players to express their creativity, like Minecraft and more



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Maver1ck reckons storytime should be over for videogames

Games should focus way less on story and way more on gameplay. Sure, they can't just launch you into a warzone without any set up, but they can give a quick "kill the bad guy" or "blow up the enemy's base" rather than drawn-out cutscenes. Games like DayZ do this perfectly - they just drop you straight in.

I played Dying Light recently, and while it is a fun game, the story and the characters made me turn on it. At the start you get bitten by a zombie, and one of your symptoms seems to be having seizures at points convenient to the plot, apparently - it's just annoying.



We were pleasantly surprised by Mortal Kombat X's story - and if even MK can do it, other devs have no excuse.

Too often, narratives are full of predictable twists and deaths. Call Of Duty: Advanced Warfare for example - you could see clearly from the start that Kevin Spacey's character was going to turn out to be the antagonist in a 'shocking' twist. They also spoiled an interesting plot point, in which you lose your arm and have to get a robotic arm replacement, in the trailers and promotional art for the game. It's true of so many stories in games - either spoiled by the marketing, or totally predictable.

Maver1ck 2789, email

There's plenty of rubbish, forgettable videogame stories out there, for sure - but we want to see them get better, rather than be scrapped entirely, and this year we've been really impressed with the narratives in games like Soma, Batman: Arkham Knight, and even Mortal Kombat X. Certainly not every game needs an elaborate set-up - but we're not willing to write off gaming's writers just yet. ■

WIN!

Got an opinion? Have even the barest grasp of words and how to put them together?

The best letter bags a free mystery game!

*Don't forget to include your postal address and chosen format!





COLLECTOR CORNER

Show us your shelves of gaming glory!



This month:

Alex Horbury, email

"My collection is currently at 300+ games over many systems, and as you can see, I have a thing for RPGs - I dread to think how many hours I've put into this lot over the years!"

Keep up the great work with the mag, I've been with you since issue one when I was 12 years old!"

Always great to hear from such a loyal fan! And we're impressed with your collection - editor Matt has a jealous gleam in his eye as he looks over your Japanese classics...

If you've got a treasure trove to rival Alex's, why not send us a pic? ■



"I'VE NOTICED AN OVERLOOKED GENRE - FILM-MAKING GAMES!"

recently Super Mario Maker, are more popular now than ever. Maybe a game like this could fill a similar niche.

Annual dexterity

This month, we asked you to cast your mind back over the last 12 months for your best gaming moments of 2015:

Playing Batman: Arkham Knight. That game is just so good, it really brings the caped crusader to life.

Josh Turner, @Turner_Dad85

Buying The Witcher 3. Got my PS4 at launch and had been waiting a for a true 'next gen' game. Best RPG since Skyrim!

Andy Rigby, Facebook

Defeating Oryx, and realising Destiny has now become the game we had always hoped it would be.

Alex Shute, Facebook

Getting destroyed by the Cleric Beast - I knew I was in for more Miyazaki magic!

Sealy Boo, @SealyBoo

The final chapter in Life Is Strange. A raw and tense emotional train ride, and a heart-wrenchingly beautiful finale.

Ryan Booth, @RawFear27

It's been a brilliant year for gaming - check out our round up of GamesMaster's favourite titles of 2015 starting over on p. 42! ■

East meets Quest

I've always loved Dragon Quest, because of the anime style, funny writing, great story, and gameplay that takes hours and hours to complete. It's made me sad to hear that the latest game might not be coming out in the west - and I'm worried by rumours that the decision to bring it over might depend on how well Dragon Quest Heroes sells. I'd happily preorder Dragon Quest XI, but I've no interest in the spin-off.

Isaac Davison, email

If we had a Yen for every time a Japanese game we wanted didn't make it westwards... The fact is that localisation is an incredibly costly and time consuming affair. Our recommendation? Get studying Japanese in your free time. It's easy, really... [Ha! - Ed] ■



YOUR TOP 5

MOST WANTED

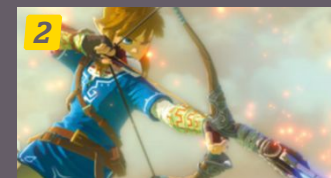
You lot are already drooling over next year's line-up - and with games like this, who can blame you?



UNCHARTED 4

Format PS4 **ETA** 18 March 2016

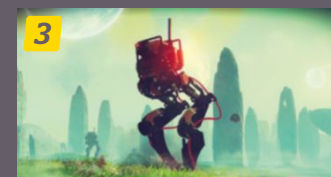
Looks like you're head over heels for Nathan Drake this month. We get it - he's dreamier than ever.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Format Wii U **ETA** 2016

Nintendo's conspicuous silence on this open world adventure clearly hasn't dampened your excitement.



NO MAN'S SKY

Format PS4, PC **ETA** June 2016

Following a shiny Paris Games Week trailer, your space faring fervour is reaching fever pitch. Let us at it!



THE DIVISION

Format PS4, XO, PC **ETA** 8 March 2016

You do love a good post-apocalypse, don't you? And here's one you'll be able to enjoy with your mates by your side.



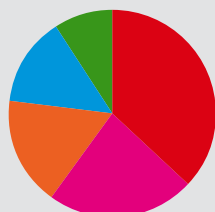
HITMAN

Format PS4, XO, PC **ETA** 11 March 2016

Some mags might be a little worried about their fans getting enthusiastic for calculated murder, but not us!

OFF THE CHART!

Fresh pie, just like granny used to calculate



- 37%** What's going to be the best game of 2016?
- 23%** Cringe-worthy multiplayer moments
- 17%** Kojima's mysterious leaving party
- 14%** The most underrated games of all time
- 9%** Showing off your fighting game poses

Wisdom and weirdness from our bustling social media channels



What is Sega planning for next year? It will be Sonic's 25th birthday! (Wow, that makes me feel old...) Does the GameMaster team know anything?

Daniel Reid, Facebook



Probably going to regret saying this, but I'm very charmed by the explosive handsomeness of GamesMaster magazine's prod ed Robin Valentine...

RedLine Alex, @MisterRedLine

MANIAC OF THE MONTH!



There should be a mandatory two year gap between sequels - companies could fill the gap with new IPs!

Adamski, @amazingdweezo



No Man's Sky... I'm expecting to get lost in that for years.

Alex Shute, Facebook



I think Kojima will make an invisibility suit for himself and secretly develop Metal Gear Solid VI: The Retirement Home.

Daniel Climo, Facebook



Why hasn't a sequel been made to Second Sight on the GameCube? I loved all the telekinetic powers!

Keith Kelly, Facebook



If you've never played the first F.E.A.R., do so. You'll never trust a ladder again.

Kieran Galaska, @beardburrito

YOU LOVE GAMES

Cool stuff and videogame culture



DIY MAGIC!

Undeterred by the lack of an official PS4 Fallout 4 controller, redditor Czornflakes has made their own custom pad with an oil-based paint pen.

CRAZY COOKING!



GM reader Susan sent us a photo of this awesome Minecraft cake. Her three sons wanted to know what the in-game treat tasted like - so they made their own!

COSPLAY STAR!



Want to show off your love of The Witcher in style? Check out KyleofAsgards Instructables guide to dressing like Geralt: <http://bit.ly/gmwitcher>



Class up any boring formal occasion with these hadoken-firing Ryu and Ken cufflinks, available from Etsy seller Jrocks Jewelry: <http://bit.ly/gmcufflinks>



Kierpanda at Eat Game Live is so excited for Overwatch, she's made cookies! Get the recipe at <http://bit.ly/gmowcookies>

16
www.pegi.info
PROVISIONAL

AOXO
PlayStation 4
EXCLUSIVE

NAUGHTY DOG

UNCHARTED 4

A Thief's End

AVAILABLE MARCH 18TH 2016

EXCLUSIVE ACCESS TO THE
UNCHARTED 4 MULTIPLAYER BETA*
WHEN YOU BUY

DRAKE'S FORTUNE • AMONG THIEVES • DRAKE'S DECEPTION

UNCHARTED
THE NATHAN DRAKE
COLLECTION

BETA SCHEDULED FOR
DECEMBER 4TH - 13TH 2015



PS4

* and "PlayStation" are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Also, "PS4" is a trademark of the same company. Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection © 2015 Sony Computer Entertainment America LLC. Published by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, 10 Great Marlborough Street, London, W1P 7LP. Created and developed by Naughty Dog, Inc. Uncharted is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. All rights reserved. *A paid for PlayStation Plus subscription. Sony's online play network account and broadband internet required for more information visit unchartednathandrake.com



Don't know what to get for the gamers in your life this holiday? Check out our Christmas gift guide!

DAVID UNCAGED

PS4 exclusives en route from Platinum Games, Housemarque, and Monsieur Heavy Rain

The Burning Question 

Who's your all-time favourite videogame robot?

HK-47
 I don't even mind him calling me a meatbag, he's always on point.
 Carl Harrison, @Cold_Waste

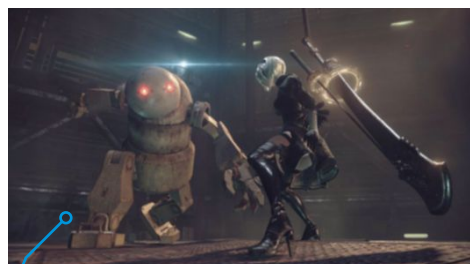
Codsworth
 It's like you're talking to a posh British butler, but with no face!
 Chris Lowles, @ChrisHazFun

Visit www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster and www.twitter.com/gamesmaster to take part in next issue's burning questions.

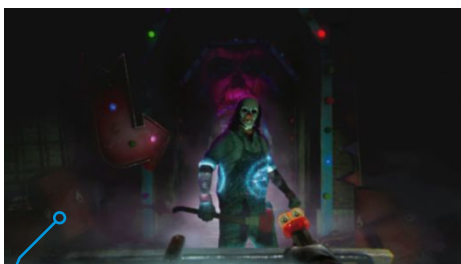


NIERLY HERE

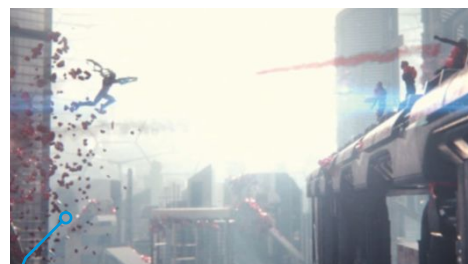
Sound the new game klaxon! Here are three virtual worlds we can't wait to inhabit...



Nier: Automata adds fast, flowing combat to the series' emotional narrative and RPG systems.



You may be armed this time around, but Until Dawn: Rush Of Blood still piles on the spooks.



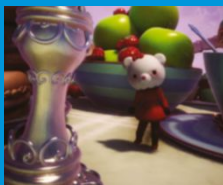
Resogun's voxel-based tech has a counterpart in Matterfall, as vanquished enemies shatter into shards.

14 Super troopers



Our brave Spartan dives into the warzone and gives us the lowdown on Halo 5's multiplayer.

18 Living the Dreams



We've seen Dreams in action, and we think we sort of, kind of know what it is now. Maybe.

20 Stick 'em up!



Find out all the big winners from the 2015 Golden Joysticks - voted for by you lot!

In Detroit, androids are forced into separate train carriages and targeted with abuse and violence. Sacré bleu.



David Cage, the gallic auteur responsible for *Heavy Rain* and *Beyond: Two Souls*, has unveiled his latest foray into interactive storytelling as part of Sony's showing at Paris Games Week. Set in a near-future Motor City in which androids are an omnipresent but oppressed underclass, *Detroit: Become Human* stars a factory-fresh automaton who grapples with her desire to be more than simply a servile machine. In typically ambitious fashion, Cage plans to interrogate "what it means to be human".

He was far from the only developer to lift the lid on a project at the event. Following its announcement at E3, Square Enix has properly unveiled *Nier: Automata*. Although this sequel picks up the narrative strands and RPG elements of its predecessor, the action heritage of new series custodian Platinum Games is plain for all to see in the footage we've checked out, as robo-protagonist 2D fences her way through legions of alien adversaries.

Resogun developer Housemarque also took to the stage to reveal *Matterfall*, a slice of sci-fi arcade action in which you'll make use of

multiplayer modes in the pipeline, as well as the bold promise that the game will capture 'the feeling of being at a live concert with over 10,000 fans'. Hopefully not in the mosh pit.

Reality bites

PlayStation VR also had its moment in the spotlight, with Supermassive Games stepping up to reveal a carnival-esque follow-up to its recently-released slasher movie simulator. Until Dawn: Rush Of Blood will guide players through a virtual reality rollercoaster ride, but unlike your average trip to Alton Towers, you'll have to shoot

"A VR EXPLORATION OF A STRANGE WORLD IN WHICH DINOSAURS COEXIST WITH HOVERING DROIDS"

nimble acrobatics and devastating weaponry as you do battle against deadly alien technology. On a less futuristic but no less fast-paced note, Polyphony Digital announced *Gran Turismo Sport*, the latest entry in its venerable racing series (though not, Sony notes, GT7). Details are thin on the ground at present, but it's naturally gorgeous to behold, and the studio promises that a beta will careen onto PS4 in early 2016.

Fans of Nordic electronica, meanwhile, will be delighted to hear that noted DJ and musician Avicii is collaborating with Swedish developer Hello There on Vector, a rhythm action game that appears to take its cues from genre classic *Amplitude*. There's a suite of single- and

down assailants and contend with a murderous harlequin. Probably fewer queues, mind.

Finally, Crytek showed off *Robinson: The Journey*, a VR exploration of a strange world in which prehistoric predators coexist with hovering droids about as well as dinosaurs can coexist with anything. You join the fray as a young boy named Robin, and have to try really, really hard not to get eaten, trampled, or otherwise ended by the planet's towering megafauna. Early adopters of Sony's virtual reality goggles are in for a treat then, with a tantalising lineup of games set to execute on the promise of being murdered by a clown or gobbled by a lizard. What a time to be alive. ■



MERGE VR HEADSET

£49.99

<http://bit.ly/gmmmerge>

There's no super powered gaming PC or console required for these VR goggles - with the Merge headset, all you need to do is slot in your smartphone. It works with both iOS and Android, and has a controller dock, audio ports, and even an anti-fog device, so no steaming up.

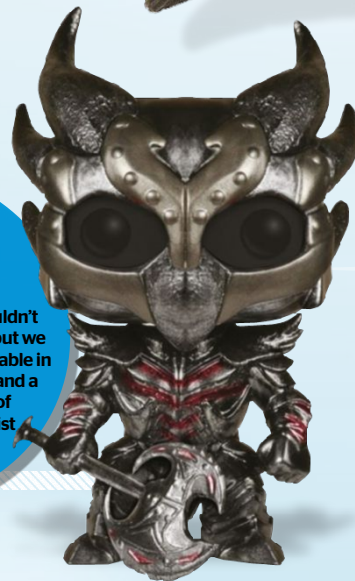


ELDER SCROLLS FUNKO POP FIGURES

£8.99

<http://bit.ly/gmelder>

A Daedric Warrior really shouldn't be this cute or pocket sized - but we can't help but love it. Also available in the collection is a Dovahkiin and a frankly adorable version of Alduin. We're trying to resist buying enough to fill Skyrim...



DIAMOND DOGS VARSITY JACKET

£55.00

<http://bit.ly/gmdiamond>

A far more stylish option than a cardboard box, this exclusive varsity jacket comes complete with the Diamond Dogs logo and the year of the events of The Phantom Pain embroidered on. Perfect for wearing while you chill out to your Bowie cassettes.

'TIS THE SEASON!

Not sure what to put in your letter to Santa this year? Or struggling to find a present for your gaming loved ones? Our gift guide has all the answers...

DESTINY ENGRAMS

£13.00

<http://bit.ly/gmengrams>

There's no shortage of Destiny awesome on the Bungie Store, but surely there's nothing better to spend your real life Glimmer on than a set of four stress ball Engrams - perfect for the Guardian in your life. Finally, guaranteed loot drops, and no Three Of Coins required.





ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE GAUNTLET

£39.99

<http://bit.ly/gmgauntlet>

This convincing replica of Evie and Jacob's all-purpose kill-glove is complete with spring loaded hidden blade and shiny knuckle dusters. For the sake of the Christmas tree, be glad the rope launcher doesn't work.



MEGA MAN BUSTER GUN REPLICA

£52.10

<http://bit.ly/gmmega>

Complete with lights and sounds, this officially licensed Capcom replica has both single and charged shots, and power up and down effects. No one's ever too old for a big plastic gun that comes with its own display stand.



VAULT-TEC WATCH

£97.71

<http://bit.ly/gmwatch>

Because life's too short to have only 12 hours on a watch. This Vault-Tec Industries single rotation timepiece has each index showing a 15 minute time period for a full 24 hour face. You might not have many minutes left though - there are only 1500 of these in existence.



FALLOUT BEER

£29.99

<http://bit.ly/gmbeer>

As if there wasn't enough to get your favourite wanderer, Bethesda has teamed up with Carlsberg to create the ultimate in post-apocalyptic beverages. Coming in a case of 12, Fallout beer is 4% and has a 'refreshing zesty, hoppy taste and a floral aroma'. Adults only, mind.



NUMSKULL CHRISTMAS JUMPERS

£34.99

<http://bit.ly/gmjumper>

Gone are the days of battling with your mum as she tries to get you into something both respectable and knitted. Numskull's official range of gaming Christmas jumpers mean you can be both cool and cosy. Yes, Team GM has its own full set.



FIRST CONTACT

Warzone brings Halo's biggest battles to date, and features up to 24 players clashing in purpose-built maps. This isn't as anarchic as it sounds, but a directed experience with evolving objectives, in which the winner is first to 1000 points. My team embarks on Apex 7's sunny shores from roaring dropships before swarming a gang of AI-controlled Covenant in a scene recalling Halo's classic Silent Cartographer level. A waypoint directs us towards the Spire which, when captured, will add to our points total, but it's guarded by two Hunter Elders. Their plasma cannons make this neutral base a killing ground, and everyone seems reluctant to fight them, even though their deaths will add to our points total. I charge in and get my hands dirty because I'm brave. Or, if nothing else, bait.

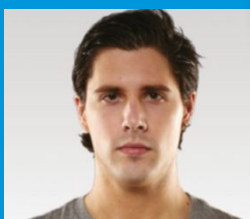
GET THE PARTY SPARTED

Reports from the front line of Halo 5: Guardians' explosive multiplayer battlefields



What are you doing reading my diary? Thinking about it, why did I send it to a widely-read magazine for publication?

Hopefully GamesMaster edits out all my dark secrets and keeps the bits about Halo 5's multiplayer which, since my campaign-only review last issue, I've spent ages playing in my underwear. [Note to editors: leave in that part as it makes me seem relatable.] ■

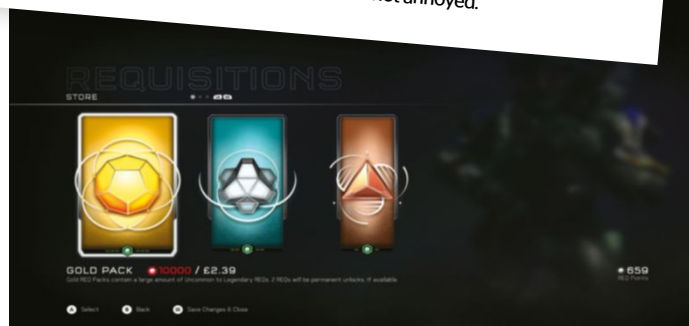


As our resident Halo expert, Ben Griffin was the only choice for this dangerous mission. A true super soldier...



MORE-ZONE

My heroism lures out the Hunters while team-mates attack their fleshy backsides. Suddenly we encounter the other team, which proceeds to murder us at long-range with burst-fire DMRs. Several deaths later, I change tack to dodge a potentially frustrating pattern. Radio comms warn of an Elite Commander dropping in, so hunkering in the tree line, I wait until he's near then fire a pillaged rocket launcher. Boom! 25 points. The crescendo sees the Warden Eternal cameo as an end-game boss, and after destroying him with two tanks and three Banshees, we're victorious. That's the thing - once one team starts to amass vehicles and power weapons, they get more kills and earn higher-grade gear, becoming practically unstoppable. It just so happens this time I'm on the winning side so I'm not annoyed.



CARD SHARP

Requisitions are cards earned through play containing modified vehicles, weapons, abilities, and armour. I'm initially concerned souped-up hardware (assault rifles with enhanced melee strikes, Warthogs with thicker skin) would unbalance the game, but aside from spiffy new paint jobs it's honestly hard to pick out functional differences. My badass gold Scorpion tank gets jacked the moment I leave the garage. And besides, you can only use them in Warzone: a green bar fills up gradually and governs what tier of tools you can order. You can sell Requisitions (annoyingly, you have to peddle them one by one) and put points towards more packs, but since they're awarded regularly anyway I don't feel the pull of paid shortcuts, like £2.99 for a gold deck. It's not that Requisitions are extortionate or unfair - more that they complicate rather than contribute to the experience.



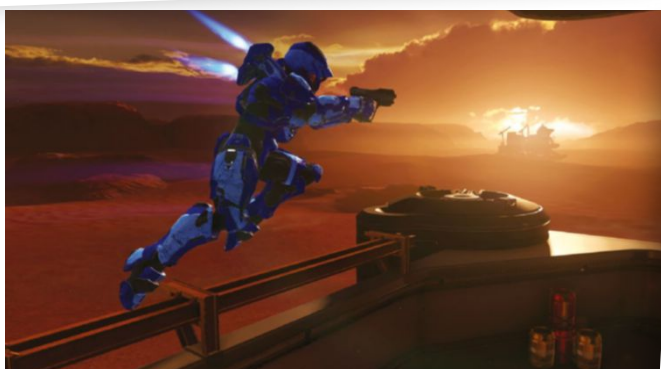
SWAT'S UP

The Arena contains more traditional playlists: Team Slayer, free-for-all, capture the flag, strongholds. SWAT's my jam, a no-radar, no-grenades, no-waiting-to-respawn affair where headshots kill. It's the mode's best incarnation yet, the chunky kick of magnums making the pistols-only sub-mode a particular highlight. It's a change of pace, players rapidly rounding corners with sights raised, sweeping crosshairs over hot zones in the hope someone runs into them. My triumphant moment comes as I cleanly cap two enemies before melee-ramming a third. With the virtual guarantee of morale-boosting kills, I return to the purity of SWAT when I'm getting pummeled in Slayer. I'm less keen on the round-based Breakout, in which you must either kill the other team or pinch their flag, because of its one-life-only structure. My brash playing style means I'm continually left watching the fight unfold without me.



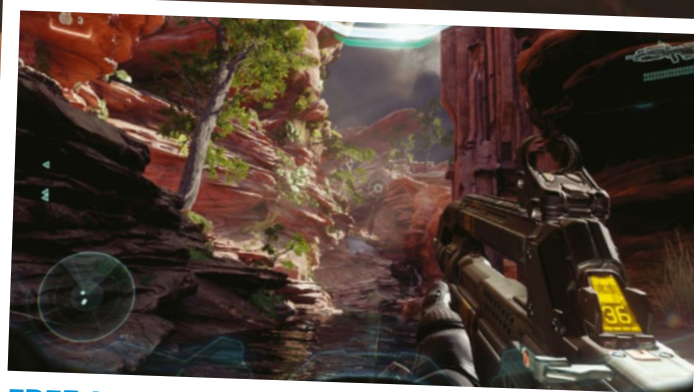
ROCKET MAN

While Halo's core remains fundamentally familiar, new weapons and features freshen up fights. I'm fond of Forerunner splinter grenades that, when thrown, split into six floating mines to block paths. At one point I accidentally fence myself in, so I try shooting the suspended bombs and, to my relief, they explode in a cluster. Later I chuck one behind an opponent and force them towards me where I greet them with a shotgun to the face. Power weapons such as the sniper and railgun have more prominence, the announcer counting down to their appearance and giving a nice sense of rhythm to matches, almost like a game of musical chairs. On the Orion map (which has sadly now been pulled) I love timing my sprinting to coincide with the rocket spawning, then in one motion leaping and blasting away enemies below.



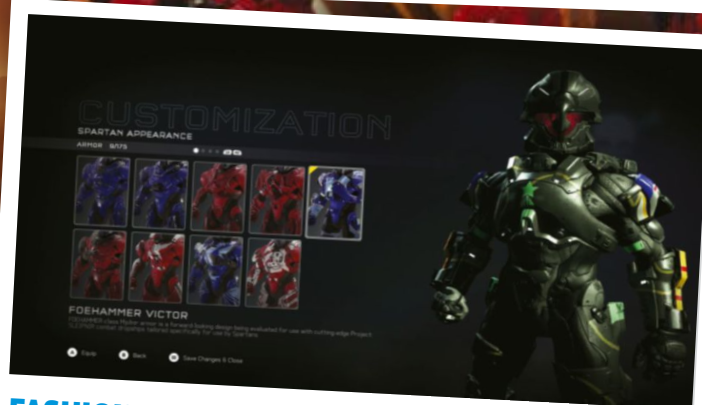
MAP CHAT

Most of the 17 Arena maps disappoint. They're not as instantly iconic as in previous Halos, and nowhere near diverse enough, repeating architecture and building blocks. Five take place on a single virtual reality construct, and there are two Midship clones. Two! At least the concepts behind each map are imaginative. ARC is a hollowed-out space in the middle of an ocean in which forcefields hold back a sea of undulating creatures. The moonlit Eden, meanwhile, takes place at a skyscraper's summit in a gorgeous gleaming city. The interesting parts always seem to be beyond the confines of the stage itself, however. Warzone maps are best, the likes of Stormbreak's ice caves, ARC's rocky ramps, and Apex 7's treeline, incorporating the landscape into level design rather than merely using it as a backdrop.



FREE AGENT

What I appreciate most about Halo as a series is its equal weighting between smarts and reaction times, and this latest entry's no different. Yes, if you can keep the reticule on opponents while staying out of theirs you'll win, but there are also alternatives to compensate for poor accuracy. If I'm caught by surprise, I'll face a wall and throw a grenade so it bounces back into my opponent's face. Concealing myself from radar while creeping with a shotgun proves just as effective as standing tall with a sniper. Even if I'm facing a vehicle, I can stick it with a grenade, freeze it with a plasma pistol, or boot the driver out. In one memorable match set on Covenant spaceship Truth, after my teammates quit, I drive fear into my opponents by stabbing them from shadowy corners with an energy sword. Unlike a lot of shooters that enforce a particular play style, there's room for expression.



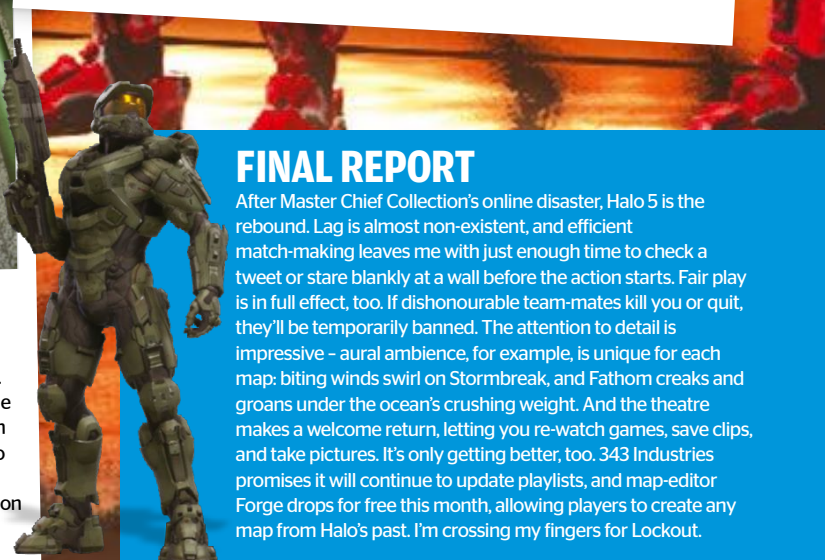
FASHION PROJECT

You can find new stances, weapon skins, assassinations, and armour in Requisition packs, although the first three are rare. It's hours before I get my first fetching orange-tinted SMG and menu screen pose. I want to fold my arms like a '90s rapper, is that too much to ask? Body customization pales compared to Destiny's modular depth, and remains unchanged since Halo 2, comprised of just two pieces in body and head. I stick with Master Chief's classic Mark VI garb, because everything else looks weird (what is up with that Centurion helmet?). Emblem design is also lacking. I can only select pre-made shapes and icons, and pick from a handful of set colour schemes. My Spartan doesn't really feel mine. You can customise your (private) games, too, setting time limits, health bar sizes, and even jump height.



PARKOUR BLIMEY

Freerunning has invaded shooters, and Halo 5 is no exception. I feel every bit the agile super soldier with unlimited sprint. Maps are also geared for maneuverability. Fathom, a research station set deep beneath the waves, contains gaps you can slide through on your knees to escape. Charged-up ground-slams rarely work, but when they do it's glorious. Most platforms are placed farther away and require a boost to reach mid-air, and since you mantle up ledges by pressing jump when nearby, you can ascend higher. This offers more vantage points. Want to know a secret? Climb on a lamppost on the city-set Plaza stage and pounce on stragglers below.



FINAL REPORT

After Master Chief Collection's online disaster, Halo 5 is the rebound. Lag is almost non-existent, and efficient match-making leaves me with just enough time to check a tweet or stare blankly at a wall before the action starts. Fair play is in full effect, too. If dishonourable team-mates kill you or quit, they'll be temporarily banned. The attention to detail is impressive - aural ambience, for example, is unique for each map: biting winds swirl on Stormbreak, and Fathom creaks and groans under the ocean's crushing weight. And the theatre makes a welcome return, letting you re-watch games, save clips, and take pictures. It's only getting better, too. 343 Industries promises it will continue to update playlists, and map-editor Forge drops for free this month, allowing players to create any map from Halo's past. I'm crossing my fingers for Lockout.



TAKE
AIM



“Relationships are more than titles. Done right, they’re worth fighting for”

Matt Clapham on why making us care about loved ones is vital to their success as a plot device

Lately, my entire world has been two things: spending time with my baby daughter, and living vicariously in post-apocalyptic Boston thanks to *Fallout 4*. (If your copy is currently concealed within festive gift wrap, don't worry: I'm not going to spoil anything you won't find out in the opening half-hour.)

You know what juggling being a real parent and an in-game one on a quest to reclaim my son has made me aware of? How regularly

videogames' impatience to get you started on shooting mutants in the face or dicing up orcs means they rely on shorthands for personal tragedy, rather than giving you time to care. Given how mad I'd be if someone hightailed it with my kid, I think we're missing out on a lot of powerful drama.

It's not just *Fallout*. Middle-earth: *Shadow Of Mordor* frames a combat tutorial around teaching your son

swordplay, and an equally brief stealth one as a way of kissing your wife, before making your family revenge fodder for a sprawling quest. Lara Croft's dad is forever going missing offscreen. Even Mario's in on this, despite starring in games where storytelling is hardly a priority - can you ever claim to have really cared when Bowser did his fireman's carry on Princess Peach, even before it became the established routine? What these examples

“IF YOU WANT TO MOTIVATE US BY TOYING WITH A LOVED ONE’S FATE, LET US GET TO KNOW THEM FIRST”

lack is the proper time to make a connection with your supposed loved one before tragedy strikes, instead telling you they are important in a vague, insubstantial manner. That's not how human beings work.

Love compartment

I'm not arguing for realism here. I adore my own kid, but the videogame of 3am wake-ups, first steps, and hours of building block-towers that sealed our bond would be tedious in the extreme. What's baffling to me, though, is that some games show how easy it is to establish at least of a bit of connection with another character and then turn that into a powerful motivation or moment. The *Darkness* did it with a bit of interactive sofa canoodling, just enough sweetness to make you wince when forced to watch your girlfriend, Jenny, die. *Fallout 3* got it right, too. Wanderings after a missing father were made more of a draw by spending quality time with your Liam-Neeson-voiced pop in the prologue.

So let's ditch the shorthand. Yes, we know we're mostly here to kill some supermutants/evil orcs/mafia thugs, but if you want to motivate us by dangling the fate of someone in the balance, then give us at least a few moments to get to know them first. Relationships are more than titles, and done right, they can be well worth fighting for. ■

STATS MAGIC The gaming month in facts and figures

2h 10m

The length of time it took YouTube user 8-Bit B*****d to complete a leisurely stroll from one end of *Skyrim*'s map to the other.

1h 55m

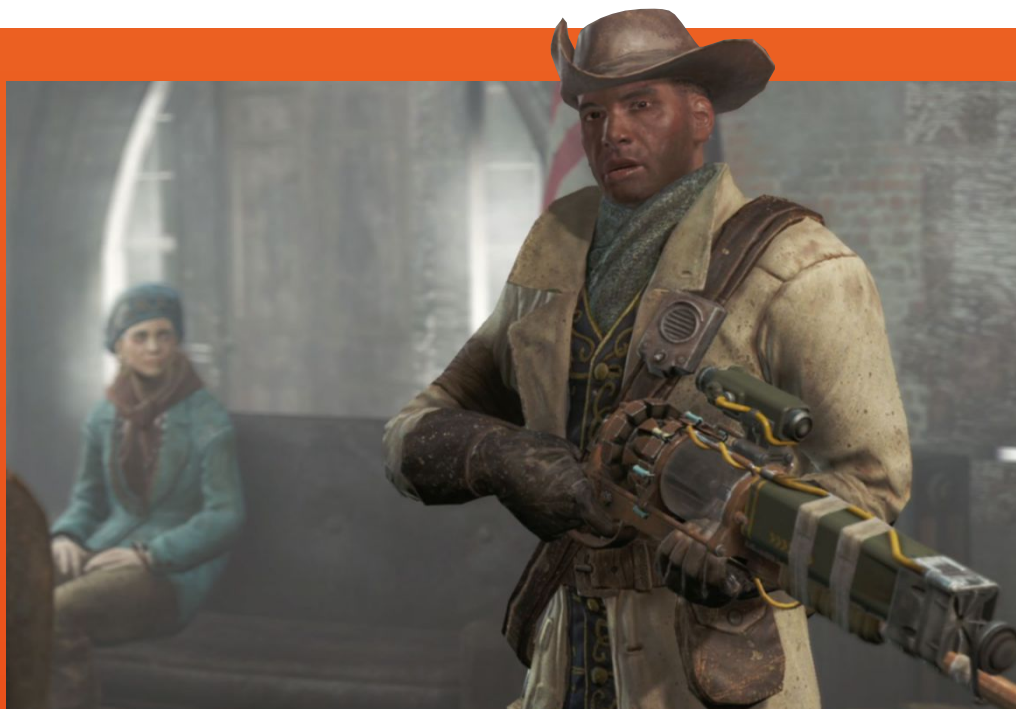
The period of time it took the same Youtuber to walk the entire length of San Andreas and Blaine County in *Grand Theft Auto V*.

2h 1m

How long it took 8-Bit B*****d to complete a nice little hike, hop, and swim from The Skellige Isles to White Orchard in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*.

41m

One more from the rudely-monikered Youtuber: this is the time spent wandering from end to irradiated end of the Commonwealth in *Fallout 4*.



“How forgiving should we be of technical issues in open-world games?”

After *Fallout 4*'s release, James Nouch argues that a game's quality is more than the sum of its parts

Every time you fire up a game, you're making an agreement with its creators. It may not be outlined in a 70-page EULA, and it might not command you to sign your name on a dotted line, but it's a deal nonetheless.

The arrangement is that you will apply your understanding of games, and expectations of the genre, to whatever you're playing. That might sound a bit obvious, but it's the reason you'd sound a bit tone-deaf if you went ape at a pixel art puzzler for failing to hit 1080p60.

Consider an average *Call Of Duty* level, for instance. It's a pretty linear affair, yes, but also an arresting corridor filled with scripted spectacle, visual pyrotechnics, and perhaps a couple of in-engine cutscenes portraying heroic sacrifice or somesuch. This is not what

we look forward to from our open-world games. Gamers have an unspoken understanding that we cannot expect the same level of craft, visual fidelity, and scripting wizardry in more open and expansive experiences.

The question as it applies to these games, though, is exactly how forgiving we should be. Do open-world titles get a free pass on AI? Should we accept clipping issues as par for the course in our sandboxes? And do we consider jank an inevitable attendant to scale?

Enticing Dogmeat

This question has leapt to the forefront of our addled minds this month with the release of *Fallout 4* – a game with more than its fair share of odd glitches and ropey character models. In the course of reviewing such an ambitious project built on such brittle tech (which I do from p60 of this issue), you have to ponder the question of just how much glitches should affect our assessments.

The answer is complex, but when players judge games, we do not consider them dispassionately as simply the sum of their parts. We receive games as an experience, and some things add to or detract from the richness of those experiences more than others. Rock steady frame-rates, solid scripting, and the illusion of enemy intelligence are all key parts of *Call Of Duty*'s achievement as a game. It fails without them.

This is not true for all games, however, and it is not true for *Fallout 4*. Breadth, humour, and world-building are integral to the series, and Bethesda's latest delivers on all those fronts. Technical shortcomings should be acknowledged, yes, and criticised – but they're only important in so far as they harm the wider experience.

Playing a game isn't a matter of comparing its qualities against a mental checklist of looks, sound, size, and story. If it was, the brevity of *Portal* would've disqualified it from game of the year lists, *Minecraft* would get a drubbing for its looks, and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* would've been panned for its lack of emotional narrative. Criticisms like these simply wouldn't be fair. We made a deal, after all. ■

“BREADTH, HUMOUR AND WORLD-BUILDING ARE INTEGRAL TO FALLOUT, AND IT DELIVERS”

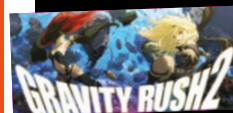
GM MOST WANTED

What's most tickling the team's fancy this month



MATT'S PICK...

Gravity Rush 2



Sony Japan's 2012 original was, in my humble opinion, one

of the best and most original games on PS Vita. (And remains so, three years on.) All new gravity mechanics sound great, but for me it's going to be the return to that visually unique world, the belly tickling sense of vertigo, and totally inimitable combat systems which ensure I'm still on board.

PS4 – Summer 2016

ROBIN'S PICK...

Horizon: Zero Dawn



Maybe it's just its robot-infested post-apocalyptic wilderness triggering fond memories of *Enslaved: Odyssey To The West*, but I'm really excited for this open-world adventure. Recent footage has suggested a strong RPG bent, which is right up my street, and damn those are the coolest looking robot dinosaurs ever to grace a videogame.

PS4 – 2016

SAM'S PICK...

Overwatch



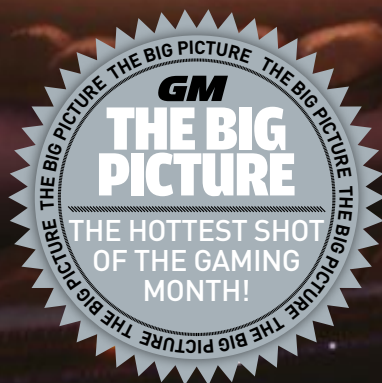
Having played a lot of COD over the years, I'm looking forward to a refreshed take on the first-person shooter, with a hefty dose of fast-paced fun injected in to it. The extensive

line-up of characters with various strengths and weaknesses is sure to impress and, judging by the beta, it looks terrific too. The only problem I have now is which character I'll play first – Roadhog is currently front-runner.

PS4, XO, PC – Spring 2016

SLEEP SHOW

What exactly do you do in LittleBigPlanet's spiritual successor? You follow your **Dreams**...



1 Whereas LittleBigPlanet sees you stitch together pre-made objects, here you're crafting from scratch like in 3D modelling software, using just your humble PS4 controller.

2 Lacking that creative spark? Search community libraries for specific models. The developer foresees players making themed 'kits' for others to use for their own creations.

3 The depth is scary - one Media Molecule developer built a hub world connecting everyone else's levels. By letting players warp to them through doors, it eliminated menus.



4 Making videos is easy: just hit the record button, act out a scene, and click stop. If you mess up, simply do another take. You can pick points to start from too, making longer scenes easier.

5 Not only can you create AI routines and feature-length movies, but you can construct your own soundtrack too. Maybe someone will even take the chance to make a good Aliens sequel...

Dreams supports Move controllers, the DualShock's gyros, its touchpad, and up-to-four-player multiplayer.



“THE PLAYER DRAWS A SMILEY FACE ON THE TOUCHPAD, AND HIS CHARACTER GRINS CHEESILY”

Even Media Molecule thinks its game defies categorisation – studio co-founder Alex Evans admits, “it’s so hard to describe. Dreams is defined by us but seeded by the community”.

Broadly, it’s a game-making tool, a three-dimensional LittleBigPlanet sans Sackboy, but where that game keeps creation separate from play, here they combine. Your avatar is a floating orb, controlled like a mouse cursor, who can possess objects at will. At a behind-closed doors demo, we see one of these flying balls enter a grand library summoned up from scratch, inhabit the body of a cuddly teddy bear, and tackle a simple puzzle involving attaching helium balloons to a lift. Other goals, says Evans, might be to cut down trees, or stick spoons on things – whatever we want. With crafting tools now realtime, though, we can’t help but wonder: could you just build a jetpack and skip to the end Scribblenauts-style, or delete everything in your way?

The truly adorable charm distracts from any knee-jerk doubts, however (the player at one point draws a

smiley face on the touchpad, and his character grins cheesily – brilliant), and item creation is a thing to behold. In a blank, blue space, a solid grey sphere is moulded like clay – the developer swaps DualShock for Move controllers, and implements finer detail, adding a nose, eyes, some fetching skull earrings, and wispy purple smoke for hair.

Molecular insanity

Then, seemingly just winging it, he slaps a tree on this newly-constructed head, followed by a smaller one, and repeats until it’s... well, tree-heads all the way down. It’s made possible by the game’s use of voxels rather than the traditional but more taxing polygons, says Evans, but we’re left wondering at the limits. Surely, without any restrictions, a player could create a monstrosity so geometrically dense as to crash the game?

But perhaps we need to worry less, and put a bit more faith in Media Molecule, given its track record (we still get goosebumps thinking about Tearaway’s ending). And if it can build a community around Dreams, the possibilities may literally be endless. “That’s why it’s going to be amazing, both for them and us, as we find out what they’re going to do with it!” ■



GTA V added the Best PC Game and Most Played awards to its heaving swag bag.

TROPHY HUNTING



The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt wins big at the 33rd Golden Joystick Awards

Geralalt took the Game Of The Year gong at this year's Golden Joystick Awards, as part of a grand knees-up at London's O2 Arena. Superhero brawler Batman: Arkham Knight and episodic hipster-sim Life Is Strange walked away with the second and third prizes respectively, in the only annual awards show decided by gamers.

More than nine million dedicated fans cast their votes, propelling The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt to a staggering total of five trophies, including Best Storytelling, and Best Gaming Moment for its memorable Bloody Baron quest. Rockstar also had a fine showing, hauling off a total of four awards for Grand Theft Auto V, including Best Multiplayer and Innovation Of The

Year for the introduction of its spiffy first-person mode.

Prize and shine

Bloodborne slinked back into the gothic shadows at the end of the evening with the Best Original Game and Best PlayStation Game prizes, while squid-based shooter Splatoon received the trophy for Best Nintendo Game. Best Xbox Game, meanwhile, was awarded to painterly platformer Ori And The Blind Forest. The late Satoru Iwata was posthumously awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Last but not least was Critics' Choice, decided by a cabal of writers and editors, awarded to Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain. Looking for an even more in-depth take on 2015's finest? Mosey on over to page 42 for GM's Game Of The Year countdown. ■

As well as all the praise heaped on The Witcher 3, developer CD Projekt Red also nabbed Studio Of The Year.



**"SQUID-BASED SHOOTER
SPLATOON RECEIVED THE TROPHY
FOR BEST NINTENDO GAME"**

These mock-ups could be greatly improved with some of our Miis - Boris Johnson chatting to Snoop Dogg, for example.



Tomodachi Life was thoroughly bananas, full of bizarre moments like the Virtual Boy-worshipping shown here.



Are our long-held dreams of synchronised Mii dance routines about to come true? Fingers crossed...

YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND IN MII

Ninty unveils its smartphone debut

Nintendo's partnership with mobile gaming company DeNA in March has borne its first fruit (Pokémon

Go being The Pokémon Company's own venture), and it's... not what we expected. More app than game, Miitomo sits somewhere between Tomodachi Life and Snapchat.

The premise is that you create and interact with your Mii, who then talks to other Miis on your behalf, sharing your answers to preset questions as a conversation starter of sorts. It seems like an extension of the ideas explored in StreetPass, but with the move to

mobile, the hope is that you'll be getting more connections than ever.

Except, in typical Nintendo fashion, you'll only be able to talk to people you've already got on your friends list anyway. Er, what? We're told we'll be learning unknown secrets about our buddies, or finding unexpected common interests - but we can't help but see this as a self-defeating concept.

Phone it in

Free-to-play with microtransactions is the plan, as part of a model Ninty's calling 'free-to-start' that will be common across all of its first wave of mobile games. It'll launch in March 2016 - alongside a new membership program called Nintendo Account.

This system will link to your Nintendo Network ID and social media accounts, bringing together your devices and even allowing you to use the eShop from your PC or smartphone. Bundled in with it will be My Nintendo, a replacement for the now defunct Club Nintendo that will grant rewards for your loyalty to the big N. The future of the company on mobile still seems a little scary, but at least we'll have a gang of big-headed Miis to hold our hands. ■

The Burning Question

Which Nintendo character would you want as a real life friend?



Mario

Always useful to have a plumber as a mate.
Chris Smith,
@ChrisSmithster



Yoshi

Free rides when I can't be bothered to walk, and he can eat people who annoy me!
Toby Allen, Facebook

Visit www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster and www.twitter.com/gamesmaster to take part in next issue's burning questions.

"YOU CREATE AND INTERACT WITH YOUR MII, WHO THEN TALKS TO OTHER MIIS ON YOUR BEHALF"





BACK CATALOGUE

Microsoft has pulled the lever marked 'Xbox 360 backwards compatibility' in its Redmond HQ, pushing out an update to Xbox One owners that enables players to spin up their dusty discs and digital downloads on newer hardware. 104 games from the last-gen console made the cut, including Mirror's Edge, Fable 2, and the Gears Of War series.



BIG TEAM'S BACK

Warzone may be a crowd-pleasing addition to the Halo formula, but the AI combatants and requisition drops of its 24 player matchups don't capture the same pure thrills of classic Big Team Battle. Fortunately, 343 agrees, and the Halo custodian has added the venerable playlist to Halo 5. Result!



LINKLE'S AWAKENING

Hyrule Warriors Legends, the 3DS incarnation of last year's Dynasty Warriors-esque Wii U hit, will include a new playable character called Linkle - and judging her name and look, she seems to be a female version of Link. What do you lot think: refreshing new take on the series' hero, or blasphemy?



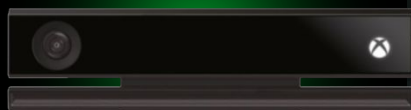
VIRTUAL AUSTERITY

London Mayor Boris Johnson has donned the plastic goggles of virtual-reality headset Oculus Rift as part of a tech event in Israel. The conservative MP spent his time with the device playing a dog simulator, and BBC cameras were on hand to capture his reaction: "This is superb... So, what's the point of this?" Then he barked for a bit.

Topping the leaderboard this issue

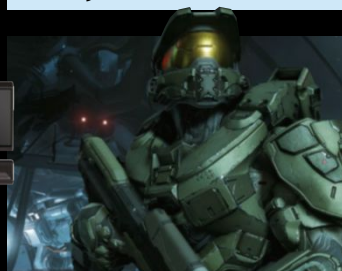
WIN
 YOU
LOSE
 YOU

No, we don't want to continue thanks



WAVE GOODBYE

Gesture-support for Kinect - the device that Microsoft once described as "an absolutely integral part of the Xbox One experience" - is no longer supported in the dashboard. An update has ditched the feature, which allowed Kinect owners to arm-waggle their way through menus, because "the reality was the usage was very, very low". Who could've predicted that?



EXPLOIT EXIT

Halo 5 may be lighting up Xbox Ones around the world, but rather than discussing DLC schedules or upcoming map packs, 343 has announced that it's unceremoniously yanking a map from all multiplayer playlists. It seems that Orion features a number of glitches that players can use to cheat their way to victory, and the map needs tweaking before it goes back into circulation.



CRINGE PURCHASE

If you're the kind of special snowflake whose individuality simply cannot be expressed through one of Sony's free PSN avatars, there's now a bafflingly awful paid selection to choose from. The worst of the bunch are currently limited to the US store, so if you need the world to know that you are a 'GODDESS' or 'King of Naps', you'll need an American PSN account.



LETCH PLAY

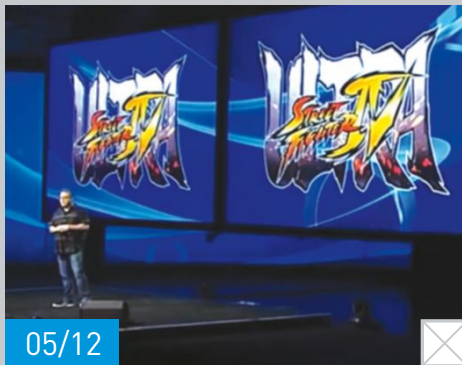
Have you ever wondered why Cortana, the Master Chief's capable AI companion, should be constantly standing around in the buff? According to Halo developer Frank O'Connor, it turns out she chooses to project a starkers avatar in a bid to "attract and demand attention". Hmm. We'll remember that next time we're struggling to get served at a busy bar.



04/12

SKELL YEAH

The unbelievably huge Xenoblade Chronicles X is here to fill up all your holiday free time.



05/12

XP BOOST

Time for some tasty Sony announcements at the second ever PlayStation Experience.



11/12

HAM IT UP

Head to the Birmingham NEC for a weekend of gaming as Insomnia56 kicks off today.



18/12

SANTA GABEY

No guarantees, but this time last year was the start of the Steam Christmas Sale. Just sayin'...



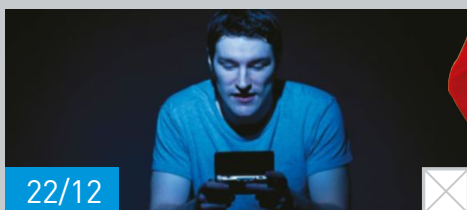
Crucial dates for your gaming diary. If you only do one thing this month, eat, but otherwise make a note of these events...



16/12

YULE LOGIN

Get your +1 Snowball Of The Tiger ready for World Of Warcraft's Winter Veil celebrations.



22/12

DARK SOLSTICE

It's the shortest day of the year, and you know what that means - a long old night of gaming.



25/12

PRESENT DAY

Christmas Day is here! Time to see what shiny videogames Santa's brought you.



29/12

ISH LIST

We count down the 100 most exciting games of 2016 in GM299, on sale now.

INCOMING

Six big releases headed to a format near you...



01

Street Fighter V
Format PS4, PC
ETA 16 February 2016



02

Far Cry Primal
Format PS4, XO, PC
ETA 23 February 2016



03

Deus Ex: Mankind Divided
Format PS4, XO, PC
ETA 23 February 2016



04

Mirror's Edge Catalyst
Format PS4, XO, PC
ETA 25 February 2016



05

The Division
Format PS4, XO, PC
ETA 8 March 2016



06

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End
Format PS4
ETA 18 March 2016



THE BLUE CORNER

Sony's showing no signs of complacency despite its **Playstation 4** topping the sales charts this side of Christmas. In fact, 2016 looks set to be the console's most explosively exciting year yet. Join us as we gaze into the bright, blue future and pluck out some juicy titbits on one seriously epic upcoming line-up...



UNCHARTED 4

CHRISTMAS 2015 **GM** 25

GM Feature

On The Cover!

Format PS4 Publisher Sony Developer Guerrilla Games ETA Autumn 2016

HORIZON: ZERO DAWN

Do you think he saw us?



Wuerilla was a little cheeky with its latest showing of the robo-saur infested post-apocalypse, playing a reworked version of its last demo. But while the setup is the same, it does start to show off some of the variety the studio wants to get in the game.

Like before, we see Aloy - courageous cavewoman of the future - hunting grazing robot deer to harvest the bio-energy canisters on their backs, but

this time we spot a different approach. Originally, she snuck up through the bushes, stealthily killing a patrolling droid before unleashing a salvo of explosive arrows, hoping to knock as many canisters as possible loose before the machines scattered. This time she tries something a little... smarter.

While the machines are high tech, your gear in the game is a little more rustic - a combination of bow, arrows, and a line launcher. Aloy uses the latter in the new playthrough to create a web of exploding tripwires between two rocks, before using her arrows to panic

GM Instant Reaction

THRILL-O-METER



An open world this beautiful and unique is surely worth waiting for.

the group and herd them into the trap. Lots of booms. Plenty of canisters to collect. Far less running about.

Cave face

With the game's focus on an open, expansive world, and plenty of freedom to express yourself (in the medium of shooting arrows at mechanical monsters), it's good to see a new slice of the tactical options we'll have at our disposal when the game launches next year. We're still hungry to see a bigger chunk, however - after over a decade of Killzone, we need a little more reassurance that Guerilla can pull off the shift to this unique sci-fi RPG. That said, we can't help but get rub our hands together over the buttery-smooth action on show. And those robot dinosaurs, man. *Robot dinosaurs.*

■ Leon Hurley

**"ALOY CREATES A WEB OF
EXPLODING TRIPWIRES, THEN USES
HER ARROWS TO PANIC THE HERD"**

Horizon is aiming for Skyrim/Witcher 3 levels of open world freedom, with some of the devs behind those games now on the team.

Format PS4 Publisher Sony Developer Hello Games ETA June 2016

NO MAN'S SKY

Hauer we going to explore all this?

We have a date! After months of speculation - and a quickly killed rumour of a stealth release this month - we finally know when we'll get to take off and explore No Man's Sky's 18 quintillion (that's 30 digits!) planets: June of next year. That might seem ages away, but as Hello's Sean Murray points out, "we get one shot to make this game, and we can't mess it up" - and with a game reaching for heights like these, we're ok with cutting them a little slack.

The announcement's joined by some exciting new footage, reaffirming the game's ambition with a spot of epic narration from none other than sci-fi cinema legend Rutger Hauer. The few brief lines play on his iconic Blade Runner speech, where he played a dying android remembering the incredible sights he's

witnessed in his life. "I've... seen things", he says, before we get a look ourselves...

And those 'things' look incredible - far-flung alien planets filled with bizarrely coloured vegetation, unfamiliar and unknown creatures with too many knees, patrolling, robotic space police, and massively explosive space battles. Even now, however, with hype levels more or less off the charts, Hello is still keeping info to a

Everything in No Man's Sky is created on the fly as you explore. Whatever you discover, yours will be the first human eyeballs to see it.



GM Instant Reaction

THRILL-O-METER



If it can deliver on its ambitious promises, this'll be a defining game.

frustrating minimum - but for a game this open, with so much procedural generation fuelling its exploration-focused gameplay, it's possible the studio isn't saying too much because it doesn't know what will happen when people get their hands on it. Which must be terrifying for Hello, though equally tantalising for us. ■ **Leon Hurley**



Format PS4 Pub Sony Dev Sony Japan Studios ETA Autumn 2016

GRAVITY RUSH 2

Shove off Newton, Kat is back

The PS Vita didn't get a lot of triple-A games, and of those early releases the original Gravity Rush didn't exactly crack the mainstream, (even though we reckoned it was brill). Apparently its small but devoted fanbase has been vocal enough, however, to bring about a PS4 remaster and a full sequel.

In case the title isn't enough of a clue, this is a game about using physics-warping abilities to float, fly, and attack enemies. In this outing, there are now three kinds of gravity (let's skip past the science of that before Brian Cox gets sad and go with it). Regular gravity is joined by Jupiter and

Lunar styles - the former makes hero Kat slower and heavier but harder hitting, while Lunar makes her lighter and faster.

Using these new abilities, she's once again fighting the Nevi, black blobby enemies with helpfully glowing weak spots which she can float up to reach with a well aimed kick attack. She's also not alone this time, with the first game's Raven on hand as an AI fighting partner.

In what we can only assume is an attempt to get 'down with the kids', the game will include a selfie mode. When Kat's not fighting, she can control the camera to take snaps of herself, and even rearrange objects in the level to get it Instagram perfect. ■ **Leon Hurley**

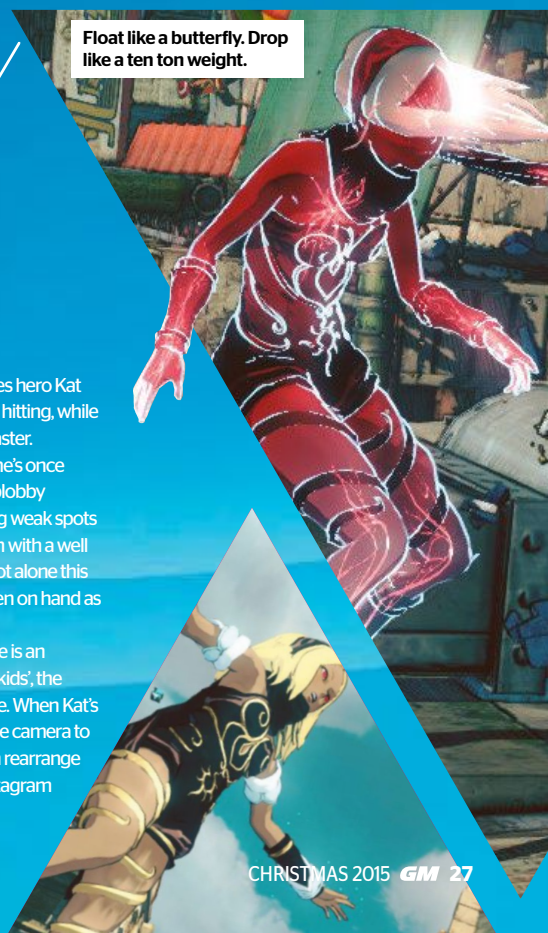
Float like a butterfly. Drop like a ten ton weight.

GM Instant Reaction

THRILL-O-METER



Can a leap to PS4 change the series from cult hit to mainstream darling?



Overwatch's story isn't traditionally told, instead relying on a Left4Dead style passive narrative delivered via clues spotted and audio heard during play.



Format PS4, XO, PC Publisher Blizzard Developer Blizzard ETA Spring 2016

OVERWATCH

Blizzard gallops into a new genre, and coasts back onto consoles, to prove that we could be heroes, just for one play... and then ten more



It's genuinely tough to pick a character for your first match in Blizzard's Team Fortress 2-tackling, MOBA-aping

first-person shooter. Chunky, Pixar-esque models, coupled with around a billion tiny innovations across the cast of 21 gloriously personality-bedecked goodies and baddies, make the choice tantalisingly difficult. But whichever you pick, you'll find fun on the other side.

Even though there has, by necessity, been intense focus on balance - making

sure the various combinations of heroes amassing for a shootout feel consistent and fair - Blizzard has done a fantastic job of hiding all of this stat-laden busywork behind an appreciable facade of perk and vim, ripped right out of a Saturday morning cartoon.

Disco inferno

All of the above is obvious at a glance, especially in the knowledge that the wider team responsible made something as complex and unwieldy as Magic: The Gathering accessible to all, via the untouchable card-a-thon Hearthstone. But let's take an extended peak behind Overwatch's gameplay curtains...

A character from the game Overwatch, Tracer, is shown in a dynamic pose, firing her submachine gun. She is wearing her signature orange and yellow suit with 'Tracer' written on the leg. Bright blue energy blasts are coming from her weapon. The background is a blurred, futuristic environment.

GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!

WATCH

Each of its characters comes ready-built and equipped with an iconic weapon or mechanic of their own. Some are recognisable, such as Soldier: 76 (Blizzard's colon, not ours), the goggle-wearing vigilante with a ready-to-roll machine gun, spring ability, and medpack combo. It's clear that this chap's been designed as a 'baby's first Overwatch character' type, to lead existing FPS players into the bubbling-over pot of peeps found at the other end of the bizarre scale.

Take Lucio, for example. This disco-infused rollerskating Brazilian DJ comes accompanied by throbbing tunes and a loudspeaker instead of a gun,

boffing foes with sound waves or buffing pals with speed boosts and healing all to the beat of his own drum and bass. Or there's Bastion, a robot who can become a turret. Or Tracer, a zippy English pilot who can rewind time. Rewind time *in a multiplayer shooter*. These are things which should not work. But they do.

The various skills and abilities spread out among all of these characters inspire hundreds of tiny innovations which delight in their discovery and utility. One of our favourites is touted by Widowmaker. This lithe lady sniper has a submachine gun which enables her to defend herself when things get sticky. At the press of a button, however, it

**"BOFFING FOES AND
BUFFING PALS WITH
SOUND WAVES"**

Watch and learn

The various ingredients thrown into the Overwatch pot



League Of Legends

2009

DOTA did it first (and best), but there's no knocking Riot Games' incredible ability to birth instantly likeable characters. Each summonable player avatar is a painstakingly balanced work of art.



The Incredibles

2004

Pixar is famed for impeccable character design (having Mickey Mouse as a great-uncle surely helps). Here that knack collided with a pervasive take on retro-but-not-actually-superhero comedy. All of the yes.



Street Fighter

1987

Overwatch's characters are designed by Arnold Tsang, whose other work spans a metric ton of Street Fighter character art. His ability to convey personality to static imagery is the stuff of legend.



Throw all of these things into a mixer and out oozes Overwatch. In truth it also packs in some elements of Team Fortress's blueprints - but with the MOBA-esque take and that wonderful roster, there's little else that plays quite like it.



transforms into a ruddy great scoped rifle. Not the type you'd find lying around in any old shooter, mark you - this beast can fire on a hair trigger for super-quick, low-damage, long-range bursts. Wait for a tiny meter to fill before each trigger pull, however, and you'll have a spike of one-hit-kill lead sitting in the chamber. This minute touch brilliantly both enables players to be trigger happy, and suitably rewards those concerned more with accuracy over spraying and praying.

For our first few matches these heroes don't seem fair at all. It's very hard, when picking yourself up off the floor after having your face rubbed into it for a whole match by a particular character, to not cry 'overpowered!' and throw up your arms in exasperation. But play longer and Overwatch's secret recipe becomes clear. You can switch characters on the fly, either between spawns or by

heading to a dedicated zone on the map. By allowing you to do this, Blizzard gives every player the means to communicate with their team, and to use these selections tactically to counter effective players on the enemy side.

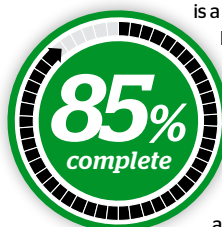
Pharah's burial

Here's where it clicks for us: an enemy player, rolling out as Pharah, is utterly dominating. An eight killstreak here, a 15 killstreak there, she's destroying us all. Then one player takes themselves out of the equation when it came to the match objective, and tries out a series of sniper class characters. Pharah's ultimate ability

is a missile barrage which sees her take to the air with a jetpack and drop rockets shouting 'Death rains from above!'. We've heard it so many times during the match, but our sniper buddy, playing as Japanese archer Hanzo, takes it upon

himself to nail Pharah the moment she starts uttering the sound bite - that's when she's at her weakest. Hanzo becomes a solution to our jetpack-shaped problem, and we sense there are a hundred more sumptuous solutions to a hundred more possible problems buried within the roster.

The blend of characters available makes for a weirdly obtuse yet satisfying series of puzzles, as you figure out who's best against who. There are unexpectedly intense face-offs just waiting to happen as skilled players clash. Playing as Tracer against a Widowmaker, we use our time-reversal powers to disappear and reappear five feet back from where we came from, thereby avoiding a flurry of sniper fire. Later on, we're able to predict the path of a rewinding enemy Tracer while playing as Widowmaker ourselves. As she pops back into existence, having pulled her temporal trick, our crosshairs are ready and waiting (fully charged) to crack her





Remember that robo-ninja we had on GM's cover back in issue 291? He has a name now! Genji rocks shurikens (natch), as well as an insta-kill blade.

Teenage pro-gamer-turned-mech pilot Hana Song (AKA D.Va) can self-destruct her suit if things get too hairy, ejecting safely out the back.

Mei boasts superior crowd-control abilities. An ice wall obstructs passage through stages, and her Cryo-Freeze gun slows foes.

perennial perkiness out of the immediate picture. Have it!

Memorising each stage's layout plays a huge part in all of this – perhaps slightly too big at this beta stage. While looking superb, and with a couple of real highlights (the cherry blossom gardens of Hanamura are some of the most gorgeous surroundings we've had the pleasure of tearing up in a shooter), there are one too many exploits which can be used in tandem with certain characters to cheese your way to victory.

The biggest culprit is Bastion. Many maps have choke points designed into them. Plonk this turret-faced bot in front

of one and there's very little an attacking team can do to effectively counter him – defending teams almost always hold out in these situations. More forgivable, for now at least, is the relatively meagre selection of available game modes. Pay Load, a riff on Team Fortress 2's similarly named cargo shifting mode, is familiar fun, and Point Capture is exactly what it sounds like, but a little more variety in the full game will be very welcome.

Console yourself

A pleasant surprise out of Blizzcon is news that Overwatch won't be a PC exclusive, being available on both Xbox

One and PS4 from spring next year. Also, despite its MOBA trappings, this won't be free-to-play. Instead Blizzard is popping the whole game into one package at a triple-A price point. It makes sense, given the character-swapping central mechanic. Following a League Of Legends-esque formula would mean isolating those players unable, or unwilling, to spend cash on individual characters. Another sign that Blizzard has built a game first and worried about making money off of it second. And how often do we get to say that about one of the big guns of game development? ■

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman

GM Instant Reaction

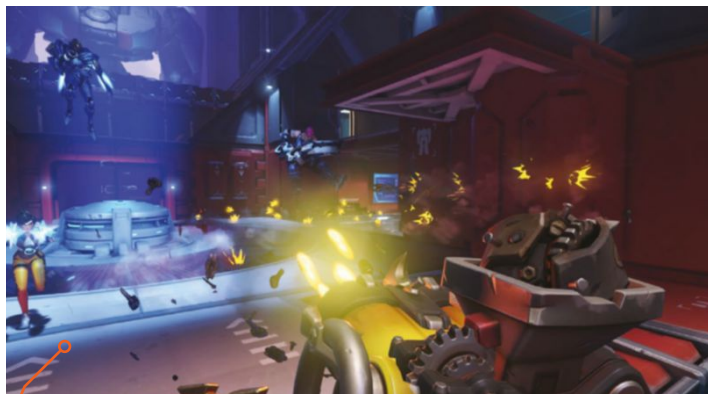
+ Characters don't just look unique, they play that way too. Each one is a delight to discover and master.

- Some tweaks still need to be made before release to ensure overall balance. We're looking at you, Bastion.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

This is set to dominate our competitive gaming evenings.



At the end of each match, all players are treated to a Play Of The Game clip. It focuses too often on straight up kill-streaks over other smart plays, but is still a neat idea.



GM Preview

Eyes-on with Future Hits



Your shaman develops skills by following certain animal divinities. Those tattoos indicate the abilities the gods have given him.

Format PS4 Publisher Sony Developer Wild Sheep Studio ETA Winter 2016

WILD

Mighty morphin' nature ranger



Any game where you can ride a bear is off to a good start. But this wilderness adventure doesn't stop with bears, or indeed riding. If you want, you can be the bear. And not in a self-help therapy book kind of way either - we mean actually possess the beast, and feel the weight of its mighty paws as you smash away enemies and give them a bloody good roaring at. Or you could be a fish. Your call.

The idea behind this animal-powered open-world game is that you're a shaman (think mystical tree-hugging wizard) able to commune with nature and control it. What you do with that? Totally up to you. Creator Michel 'Beyond Good & Evil' Ancel is keen to stress this is about freedom and interpretation. You have power over animals and the ability to talk with gods, but how you use that to solve problems is completely freeform.

Ancel's example involves the shaman being asked to save the life of a girl bitten by a snake. To do that he must contact one of many divinities - in this case a snake god who, if she's pleased by the sacrifices made, will help him cure the girl.

Bear necessities

Even more exciting are the array of animal-specific tricks and skills you can use. For instance, the bear is fast. Jump on his back and you can clear a lot of ground, rapidly. But you could also directly possess and play him, leaving your shaman tucked away safely as his mind journeys off inside the animal.

It could be any animal too. In the demo mission we see the bear, as well as an eagle and hare, useful for high-flying reconnaissance and darting stealth respectively. However, every creature is fair game, and this is where things get interesting: so

"YOU CAN DO WHATEVER YOU WANT, ESSENTIALLY. PRETEND IT'S GTA, ONLY THE CARS ARE BEARS"





far we've only seen the snake divinity, but every animal has a god. Fish, sheep, wolves, and boar are some of the variations mentioned, each with a supernatural ruler. Paying your respects to any will level up that path.

Depending on how you want to play, or the animals you like, you can pick any god, then pay your dues to build out a character. Probably more impressive with some than others. "Quake before the awesome power of the... frog."

Ancel is confident that all animals have a use. We're shown a baby boar being possessed, and told that you could use it as bait to lure predators to your enemies. Even sheep can be dangerous. Take over the alpha of any given group of creatures and you control the pack. One bleater might not be a threat, but a herd could have some serious trampling power.

Fur game

It's a world, then, full of furry tools to use as you see fit. Freedom is paramount: Ancel is trying to create an emergent world where there's a goal, but not necessarily a fixed solution. And it's beautiful too, full of rolling hills, swamps, mountains and other variations. You start in a different location for every game to keep things changing. There are shelters to find that act as fast-travelling bases as you explore and expand your territory.

And you're not alone. Online play is optional, but adds an extra dimension that's a mix of social, MMO, co-op, and competitive ideas. Like the rest of the game there are no fixed rules, just potential. Other players will inhabit your world and just do their own thing. Maybe they'll find you in an animal-possessing trance, and kill or rob your shaman. Maybe you meet up and explore together, possessing birds to get a literal eagle eye's view of the landscape.

The overriding theme throughout Wild seems to be freedom - you're given tools, options and ideas but not forced to use them in any given way. There's not even a HUD as such. Instead, what you can see and hear tells you what's going on around you. If you can hear an animal then it's there to use. See an interesting thing in the distance? You should probably check it out. You can do whatever you want. Just pretend it's GTA, only the cars are bears. **Leon Hurley**



Not since Space Station Silicon Valley have we been so free to hop from animal to animal. What do you mean you don't remember that one?

GM
Instant Reaction

Impressive potential, scale, and an interesting twist on an emergent open world. There's no other console game like it.

It's going to really have to nail some ambitious core concepts to deliver, and it's still early in development.

THRILL-O-METER

1

2

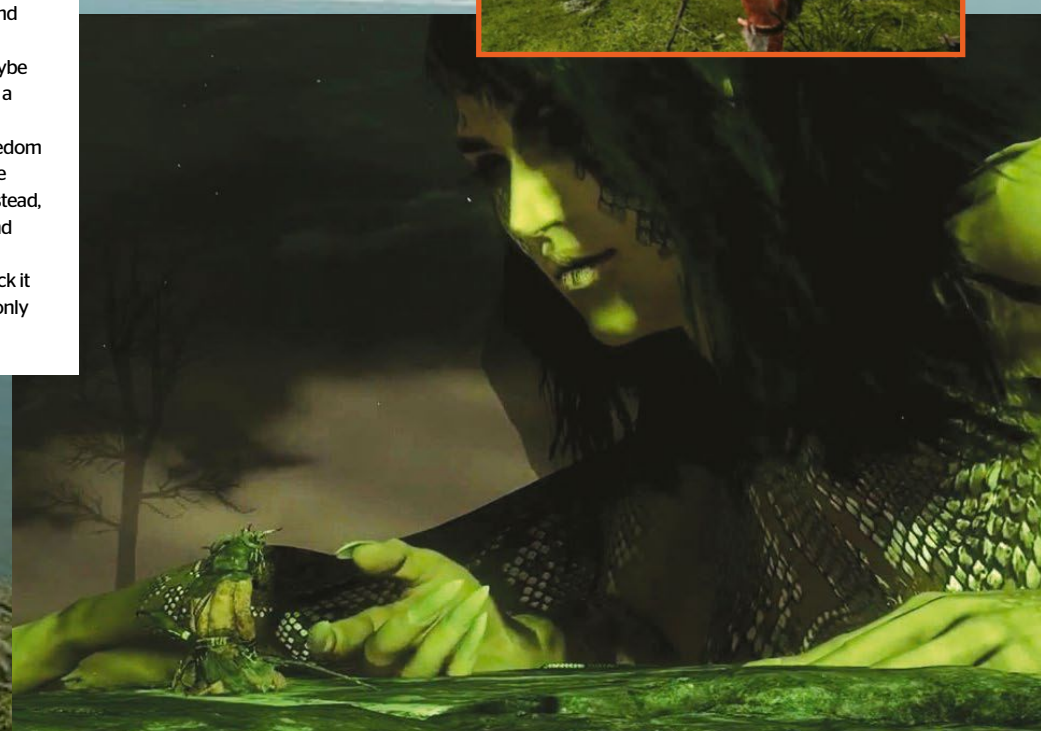
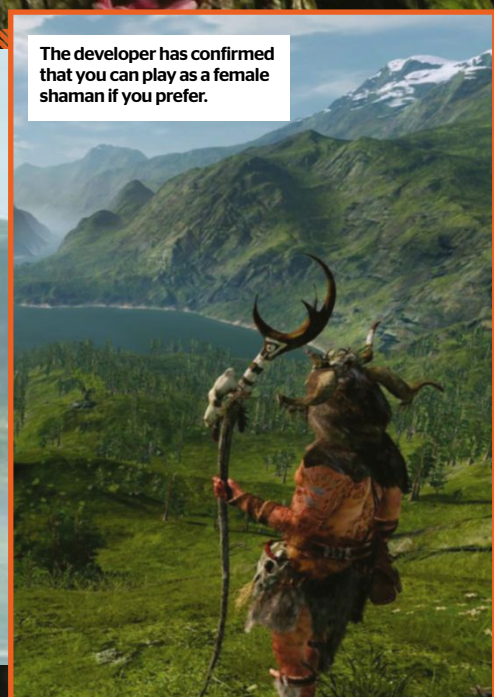
3

4

5

A natural adventure where animals are your weapons and gadgets.

The developer has confirmed that you can play as a female shaman if you prefer.



GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!



Characters generally come in one of three flavours – defence, attack, and support – making effective teamwork key.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Developer** Gearbox Software
Publisher 2K Games **ETA** 3 May

BATTLEBORN

Cracking heads and loot crates in our competitive hands-on

Gearbox's biggest challenge lies in balancing this character-stuffed competitive, co-op, and solo shooter. With 25 currently and more to come, each a far-future warrior armed with magic and technology, it'll be a tough job.

During our hands-on of Capture, which sees two five-person teams fight to hold three bases and reach 1000 points first, we discover our first mismatch. As melee dwarf Boldur, telekinetic aristocrat Phoebe keeps peppering us with attacks, then floating off easily when pursued. More than a little annoying.

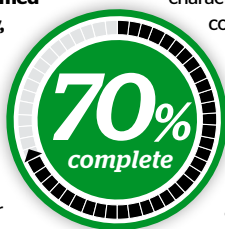
Balance is of principal concern for Battleborn's creative director Randy Varnell. "In a game with so many builds and so many characters, it surprised us all the time, even in Gearbox with our limited pool of players, so I know when we go to the wild we'll see a lot more

combinations," he says. "We've got a massive data architecture in the back-end that allows us to watch how much damage a character is doing, how much he's taking, which characters are winning, which are losing, how they're doing in engagements against other characters, and we watch that with complex dashboards."

Axe pain

For our own predicament, Varnell suggests using Boldur's dash to close the distance, chucking throwing axes, and knocking Phoebe into objects for a quick stun. The

other solution, of course, is asking your allies for help. Battleborn is team-based after all: up to five players in the co-op story, and up to ten across three PvP modes. And if none of that proves effective, you might just be unlucky. "There are some characters that are very good against others... that's going to emerge as you play the game." We're hoping Gearbox prioritises a level playing field. **Ben Griffin**



GM Instant Reaction

+ Outrageously unhinged characters include a robot butler and a mushroom man, and they're good fun to use.

- Playing this and Overwatch in the same month really highlights an unfortunate gulf in quality at this early stage.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Borderlands meets MOBAs? We still need to be convinced.



In the game's universe, various factions have allied against the evil and destructive Verelsi, and send their best warriors, known as the Battleborn, to fight them.

GM Instant Reaction

+ The ridiculous-haired cast has never looked so pretty, Unreal Engine 4 is working wonders on old favourites.

- With long-term rival Street Fighter V set to launch in February 2016, Tekken has some stiff competition to fight off.

THRILL-O-METER



Shows all the signs of being another top-quality arcade port.

Format PS4 **Publisher** Bandai Namco
Developer Bandai Namco **ETA** 2016

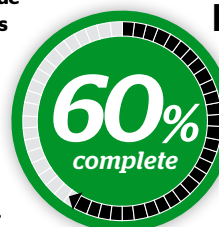
TEKKEN 7

A triumphant return for the King. Kazuya staring at, tough guy?



he ninth entry in this long-running fighting game series (counting the two Tag Tournament games) will soon

rising uppercut its way from Japanese arcades and onto worldwide PS4s. Though it was always going to make the move onto home consoles eventually, this is still especially exciting news for fans, who'll be cruising for a bruising in fine fettle from early 2016.



Xbox One owners, fear not. Although the big announcement came via a Sony conference, there's been no news of full exclusivity, so chances are we'll get versions for other consoles, including XO, in good time. It looks like PS4 will get some unique content, however.

As anyone au fait with Tekken will know, the Mishima clan followed by much of the series' story is... a bit messed up. There's enough family tension

between father and son rivals Heihachi and Kazuya to keep Jeremy Kyle in business until the end of days. Tekken 7 promises to pull back the curtain on their darkest secrets and those of the Devil Gene, plus other Tekken mysteries. (How does Paul get his hair to stay up?)

Lava drama

These dramatic power struggles should be even prettier than ever. Seeing CG footage of the aforementioned daddy issue duo silhouetted against an exploding volcano hints at a possible fighting stage. And get

this: Tekken 7 will be PlayStation VR compatible. Details on this are scarce, for now - a third-person fighter isn't a natural fit for virtual reality - but we suspect you won't actually be battling in, say, first-person, as that sounds like a one-way ticket to Upset-Tummysville. With sunglasses-wearing series veteran Katsuhiro Harada at the helm, Tekken 7 looks to be in safe - albeit soon to be heavily scuffed - hands. **Alex Jones**

Kazuya and King are back, along with Heihachi and Asuka. Best-named new character: Lucky Chloe.

GM Preview

Eyes-on with Future Hitman

Visuals are phenomenal, with special attention paid to cloth physics. Oh you better believe 47's scarlet tie moves in the wind.

Format PS4, XO, PC Publisher Square Enix Developer IO Interactive ETA 11 March 2016

HITMAN

Keep on assassinating in the free world

At its icy best, IO's *Hitman* series projects a fantasy of the calculating killer, a psychopathic James Bond who infiltrates exclusive establishments and dispatches the pompous elite with silenced pistols, piano wire, and the odd exploding BBQ (you know, for comic relief). 2012's *Absolution* was a thoroughly nastier affair, nauseously lurching from sweaty fight pits, to seedy strip clubs, to encounters with sleazeballs so odious you felt like taking a shower. Thankfully this sequel is a rather classier affair.

Sapienza is the latest environment unveiled, a sun-dappled fictional jewel on the glittering Italian coast. This dense destination is a canopy of copper-hued terraced roofs covering tangles of darkened alleys through which to creep, landmarks within including a luxurious

mansion, lofty clock tower, and intricate medieval church. As with *Hitman*'s other two massive stages, it's around six times larger than *Absolution*'s biggest, Streets Of Hope, and as if to prove the point, IO ditches the checkpoints of that more linear game. Here, you save when you like.

Killer crème

This is less about reducing difficulty and more to grant experimental freedom. Larger levels contain more death traps per square inch: gas heaters to tamper with, lighting fixtures to unscrew, windows overlooking cliffs you can pluck view-gazers from, food to poison. Speaking of, *Hitman* contains three types of toxins – killing, sleeping, and laxative – and most food can be laced with them. Avoid the vol-au-vents.

There are more people to mess with, around 300 unique characters per level compared with *Absolution*'s 50, and

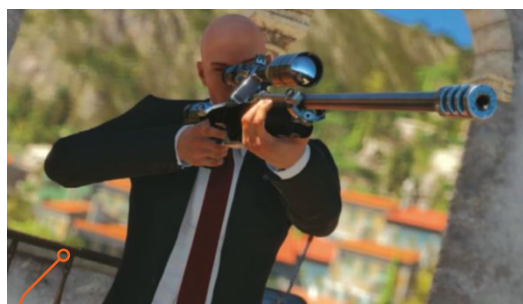
crowds of up to 1,300. You might fire a shot to start a stampede and cap your target in the confusion, or head to the church and walk past the bowed heads to find the priest, wait for a quiet moment, then deck him to obtain his robes. Hopefully 47 says a few Hail Marys.

Yep, it wouldn't be a *Hitman* game if our hero couldn't steal clothes like a follically challenged Terminator, and in Sapienza security guards are your best bet, thankfully equipped with black caps perfect for covering bald heads. The obvious mark is a mysterious chap in dark sunglasses and a blue shirt, who strolls through his villa playing golf and paying respects at a flower-strewn cemetery, giving you plenty of openings. You could steal a chef's clothes and infiltrate the kitchen to spike his food, or grab a knife there and spike him more literally, or ascend a watchtower with a





IO Interactive's sixth Hitman offering features the largest locations ever in the series, so that means richly detailed interiors to complement sprawling exteriors. Sneak past the worshippers, then pop the priest.



To pass guard checkpoints sans incident, stash conspicuous weapons like this in safe houses before the mission begins.



See that figure on the clock tower? That's 47. With his new climbing abilities you can get to some great vantage points.



high-powered rifle. 47's a lot more mobile, able to scale drainpipes and mantle ledges for sneaky access to high vantage points. When you're done, speedboats littering a central dock can be used as an extravagant extraction - provided you can find a set of keys.

More intricacies lie in the Paris-based Showstopper stage demoed recently. The developer parks 47 behind a wall and flies a camera through the environment to show complex routines of inhabitants unfolding in his absence: supermodels feverishly applying makeup backstage, wine-guzzling guests mingling in the ballroom, and a small army of security guards, cooks, and repair men dutifully ambling around. They're reactive too. At

one point 47 walks through a reporter's shot and the camera man mumbles, "Can you believe that guy?". In total there are 60 rooms in the palace and 100 accidents waiting to happen. It confers a vital sense of anonymity in a world that ticks regardless of your presence.

Stage select

Here's where it gets controversial. Hitman launches with Paris, Sapienza, and Marrakech stages in March, with six campaign missions. That's the Intro Pack, costing \$35 (IO is yet to announce UK prices). After March, it'll release three more locations in Thailand, US, and Japan. Together they cost an extra \$30. It's \$60 for everything up front.

It's a move by a developer reluctant to hold back the game any longer - Hitman was originally slated for December - but who also understandably needs to make a profit from post-release content. Even if you could sympathise with the staggered release, value aside, cutting the campaign directly in half could sabotage momentum in the story the dev is trying to tell. Releasing all the content at once for a fixed price point later in 2016 would have been the less confusing, less potentially expensive, option.

That there are only three locations at launch is disappointing, but if IO's claims about scale are accurate, these are maps to be played multiple times. Absolution's free appetiser Sniper Challenge was restricted to a single rooftop, yet potentially lasted hours. The sixth Hitman returns to the sprawling sandboxes on which Agent 47 made his name and number - let's just hope with the new pricing structure IO hasn't built its house on that sand. **Ben Griffin**

"POISON COMES IN KILLING, SLEEPING, AND LAXATIVE DOSES. AVOID THE VOL-AU-VENTS"

GM Instant Reaction

+ Giant stages, six times the size of the last game's levels, bring back 47's classically lethal non-linear experimentation.

- Unconventional pricing means you'll potentially pay a lot more for the full game than you normally would.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

There are fewer locations, but they're massive - Hitman's back!

GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!

Format PS4, XO, PC Publisher Bandai Namco
Developer From Software ETA 12 April 2016

DARK SOULS III

Miyazaki's ruthless return to his classic series gives us the chills

Death has always been the focus of From's iconic series. Usually it's you who does all the expiring, but this time the world itself feels fragile; an ashen, tired fire, on the point of expiring. Not that it changes the usual mantra: if at first you don't succeed, die and die again.

As ever, you don't have to face your fate alone. Multiplayer is more like Bloodborne, letting you set passwords to team up with a specific player. We play a version specifically for testing online capabilities, and the world is busy with other players - after being summoned to one world, we have four PvP encounters in the space of 10 minutes.

Player scraps feel refined - more direct and meaty, with none of the glitchy, roll-behind back-stabbing often encountered in the first game. And unlike Bloodborne, there doesn't seem to be a cost for summoning other players - though that might still change in the final version.

In keeping with the central theme of fading fire, we also experience an icy new

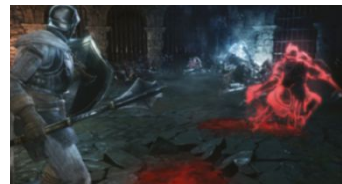
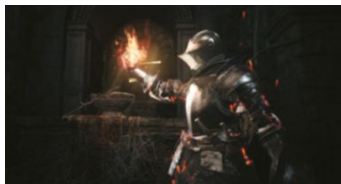
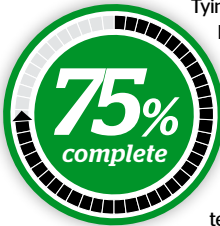
debuff called Frostbite. It works in a similar way to Curse in Dark Souls and Frenzy in Bloodborne - though thankfully a little less debilitating. We encounter one particularly chilly miniboss, hidden in the depths of the level, who's surrounded with an aura of it that slowly saps our stamina and speed. It's possible to back off, heal, and keep fighting - but the sense of vulnerability sticks with us.

Icy dead people

Tying into these themes too are Embers. They work similarly to Humanity in previous games - using them restores health and gives you access to online interactions, but you lose that benefit when killed. In terms of lore, it's fascinating.

The world feels like a fire going out, with no way to relight the flame - so every dying ember is precious.

It all hints at some degree of finality, especially when you think about rekindling the fire in the first game. For whatever reason, it's failed. There's a desperation to Dark Souls III, but also a sense that it's time to let the world burn out. As ever, Souls is about embracing death, not fearing it. **■ Matt Elliott**



The magic we've seen so far has been powered by a new mana bar-style magic gauge, rather than the limited-uses-per-rest system of previous entries.



Familiar spells from previous Dark Souls games return, including the ever-handy Lightning Spear.



Instant Reaction

+ Crisp, flawless combat, and a world that just begs to be explored. Immediately playable, but ruthlessly challenging.

- After the rich, varied, and twisting setting of Bloodborne, Dark Souls might seem glumly familiar.

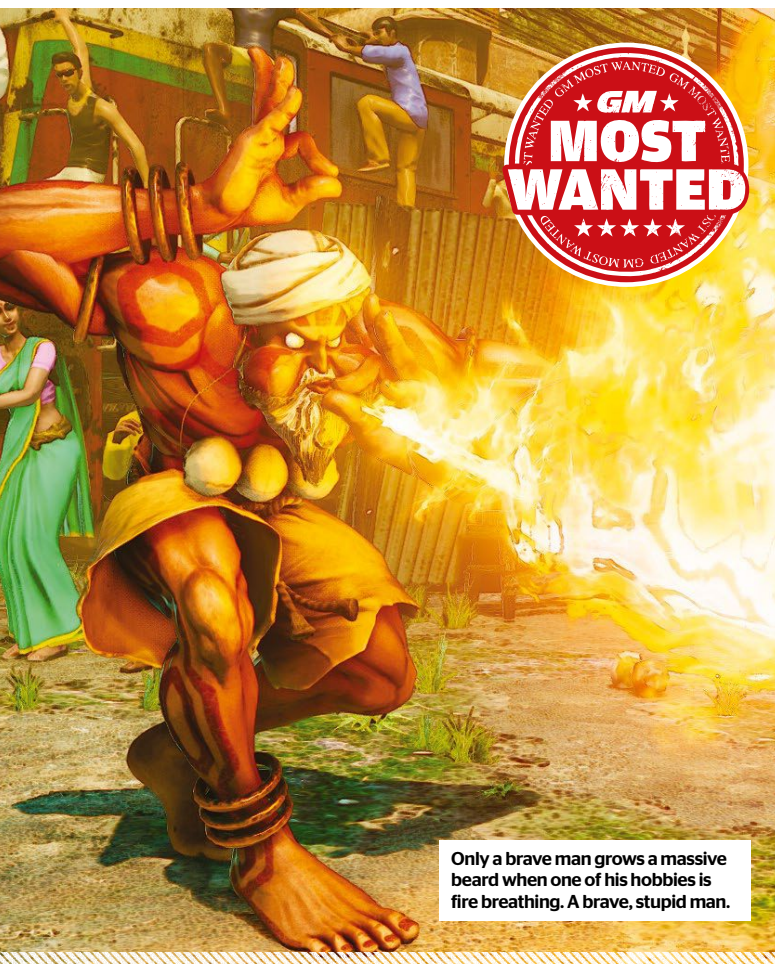
THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

A bleak, dying world, but still relentlessly compelling.



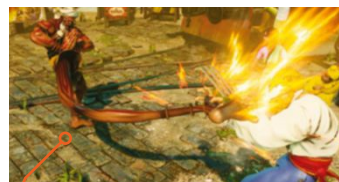
If you were to summarise the Souls series up in a single image, this would be it. An Estus cocktail of despair, triumph, and player-on-player viciousness.



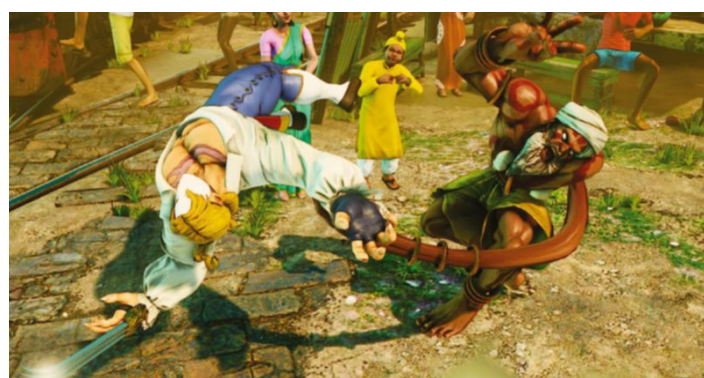
Only a brave man grows a massive beard when one of his hobbies is fire breathing. A brave, stupid man.



Dhalsim's V-Skill lets him float. We'd make a 'just like in real yoga' joke, but he can also breathe fire and has limbs like taffy, killing the gag. So selfish.



Dhalsim is the first true zoning character in Street Fighter V.



GM Instant Reaction

+ A deep, reactive fighter that retains the series' flash and flamboyance - immediate, but with amazing longevity.

- Some of the female characters 'boast' design as flimsy as their clothing. Hopefully that's tweaked before launch.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Every day without playing Street Fighter V is a day wasted.



Format PS4, PC Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom ETA 16 February 2016

STREET FIGHTER V



Scrapper sequel shows off snazzy tutorial and a beard to be feared

There's not much time, so let's get to it: since we last talked, Street Fighter V has a) even more beards and b) a narrative-driven tutorial. It's also shaping up to be the most immediate entry in years.

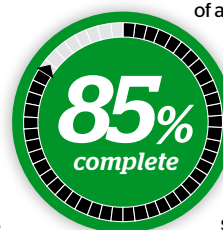
jowl-drugget. It's a game that, brilliantly, encourages showmanship.

What's Gouken?

The tutorial has a younger, floppier Ryu and Ken training under Gouken. As well as providing an easy in to an already enticing game, it suggests the possibility

of a narrative campaign, and perhaps other throwback characters. At the moment, it feels placeholder - the hand-drawn interludes, while stylish, could easily change - but it's a smart move, especially after the success of Mortal Kombat X.

Elite players can worry about top-tier characters and startup frames, while casual scrappers can just throw a few fireballs and enjoy the daft story. It's not enough that Street Fighter V feels incredible to play - for the first time ever, it might end up offering compelling narrative as well. **■ Matt Elliott**



We're horribly obsessed. Combos are easier than ever to execute, but the timing is tight enough that you don't always get it right: it's amazing when you do, inspiring when you don't. Clever tweaks, such as Mika's ability to buff her moves with a mic promo, can be chained into further blows in ways you'll spend months discovering. Crisp combos and intelligent strategies emerge even if your standard Street Fighter approach is to learn one special and spam it until your beard grows as long as Dhalsim's new



Some leering animations from the first beta, such as Mika's butt-slapping close up, have been removed by Capcom. Street Fighter never needed to be *that* game.

GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!



You might not be able to see the dogs ready to pounce just out of the frame, but hey, that's kind of the point.

Format PS4, XO, PC, PS3, 360 Developer Capcom Publisher Capcom ETA Spring 2016

RESIDENT EVIL ZERO HD REMASTER

Back-from-the-dead survival horror series just keeps on shuffling

Tank controls *shouldn't* work anymore. The archaic scheme sees you blunder a character about any given locale with all the grace and poise of a drunk sloth in an actual Panzer I (with a similarly restrictive turning circle). It *should* immediately frustrate. But here in this remake of the GameCube original, much like the HD re-do of the series' first outing last year, it turns out that deep down we secretly miss the age of D-pad-centric controls.

The point, as any Resi traditionalist/apologist will tell you, is that you're supposed to feel a little out of sorts. Not being a smoothly-operated shotgunning machine makes you feel just that little bit more vulnerable as the corpses groan into undeath around you. There's also a directorial hand at play, ensuring that the gorgeous isometric backgrounds you

wander through work incredibly hard to ratchet up tension. We can see a modern gamer, raised on quest markers, bottomless inventories, and analogue sticks, immediately ricocheting off Resi Zero. But stay a while, let the sedate pacing draw you in, and there's much to love here. Not the story, though. The

story is as blue-cheese a brand of Resi as you could get, focusing on Rebecca Chambers and Billy Coen as they discover the origins of the t-Virus prior to the first game.

Zero, of course, was not the most celebrated of Resis. It saw a vast swathe of its PS1-bred target audience

unable to play. As such, this is a much less memorable affair. You can't sigh knowingly at a reference to bread-based dialogue if you never sighed with the awfulness of it the first time. In place of the nostalgia factor, though, comes an appreciation of what made these games great, and why modern horror outings could learn to spend more time crafting atmosphere and less time jump scaring.

■ **Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman**

GM Instant Reaction

+ Looks lovely, despite its age. The backgrounds especially are great, with fantastically atmospheric lighting.

- Entrusting the camera to Resi's directorial hands will be infuriating for those raised on modern third-person outings.

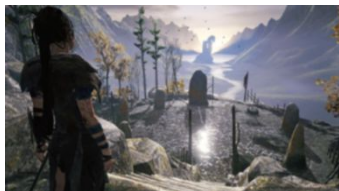
THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Proof modern survival horror has much to learn from its forebears.



A dangerous escaped criminal and a special forces operative respectively, Billy and Rebecca are a classic odd couple. In that everything they say is incredibly odd.



Format PS4, PC **Pub** Sony
Dev Ninja Theory **ETA** Autumn 2016
HELLBLADE

It's not often that bloodsoaked brawlers concern themselves with authenticity, but Ninja Theory's latest aims for psychological verisimilitude in its depiction of a Celtic warrior working through the trauma of a violent Viking invasion. The hellish landscapes and monstrous enemies, then, are projections of psychosis, and the studio has consulted with academics and charities in a bid to ensure accuracy in its portrayal of mental illness. Doesn't sound like your jam? Fret not. There are great big swords to swing too. ■ **JN**



Format PS4 **Pub** ROI Games
Dev ROI Games **ETA** Summer 2016
WHITE DAY

This Korean chiller debuted on PC in 2001, and although it's never received an official western release, its brand of high school horror remains popular with genre aficionados and scaredypants streamers. If the promise of a campus filled with spectres and murderers isn't terrifying enough, ROI's remake requires you to strap on the PlayStation VR goggles and experience the cavalcade of spookery up close. There's no firm word on a release date just yet, but we've already begun stocking up on heart medication in readiness. ■ **JN**



Format PS4, PC, Mobile **Pub** Sony
Dev Thekla Inc **ETA** 26 January 2016
THE WITNESS

Jonathan Blow has at last announced a release date for his anticipated puzzler, confirming a January launch to the tune of jaunty violins in newly-released gameplay footage. Blow and co are now hard at work bashing bugs and making carefully-calibrated tweaks, but the developer claims that the game has ballooned in size from a paltry eight-hour playtime to an experience that will take dozens of hours to defeat. Perhaps you'd best book some January vacation time to make the most of this contemplative island getaway. ■ **JN**



Format PS4, PS3, PS Vita **Pub** Atlus
Dev Vanillaware **ETA** Summer 2016
ODIN SPHERE: LEIFTHRASIR

This PS2 curio looked the business on release in 2008, and now Vanillaware is giving it an HD polish, the halls of Valhalla are looking shinier than ever. Odin Sphere offers a Japanese take on Norse mythology, a crisp 2D fighting system, and a brilliantly bonkers mechanic in which you plant seeds and water them with the souls of your vanquished foes. If the promise of playing a beautiful botanical brawler as Odin's daughter doesn't get you excited, then perhaps nothing ever will. ■ **JN**



Format PS4, PC, PS Vita **Pub** Double Fine
Dev Double Fine **ETA** Spring 2016

DAY OF THE TENTACLE: REMASTERED
Squid pro quo

Double Fine is plundering its founder's mammoth back-catalogue once again, wheeling out Tim Schafer's adventure game classic for the HD beautification treatment.

The beloved tale of three time-travelling teens - originally released in 1993 as the sequel to Maniac Mansion - has been updated with hand-drawn art, remastered sound, and a new audio commentary recorded by a gaggle of the original creators. Other tweaks include the addition of a swanky verb dial for those who don't want to fiddle and fuss with a box of commands.

Nostalgists and purists can breathe a sigh of relief, however, as all of these changes are optional. Much like the remakes of Grim Fandango and Monkey Island, you'll be able to switch between charming pixelation and lustrous definition at the touch of a button. ■ **JN**

GM Instant Reaction
THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5
A perfect excuse to relive a classic.



Format PC **Publisher** Blizzard **Developer** Blizzard **ETA** Summer 2016

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: LEGION
A summer party on the Broken Isles

It's all getting a bit hairy over in Azeroth. **Subscriber numbers are dwindling, for one thing, and the bloomin' Burning Legion is on the warpath again, taking time out from its busy schedule of creating mean ol' Lich Kings to wage all-out war on your conflict-ridden world.**

So runs the premise for Legion, and Blizzard has now committed to a release date of Summer 2016 for the sixth expansion to its all-conquering MMO,

promising heaps of new content for both righteous Alliance heroes and filthy Horde reprobates.

The Broken Isles, one-time home of the Night Elves, will serve as the setting for Azeroth's last stand, and the place to find the game's new powerful, upgradable arms: Artifact Weapons. Indeed, such is the desperation in the air that Azeroth has made a dark pact with the Demon Hunters of the Illidari - an agile new hero class that'll be available to play ahead of the expansion's release for those keen enough to drop dollar on a pre-purchase. (And by dollar, we mean 35 English pounds.) These

creepy elven critters are not only able to tap into the power of the fel, but they're even capable of transforming into formidable, hellish forms.

Naturally, this wouldn't be a World Of Warcraft expansion without a welcome little bump to the level cap, which jumps from 100 to an intimidatingly colossal 110. Best close the curtains, dust off that Battle.net account, and make sure your raid gear is on-point. ■ **James Nouch**

GM Instant Reaction
THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5
Cool additions, but to an 11 year old game.

THE 2015 GAMESMASTER AWARDS

Welcome back to the most prestigious event in the GM calendar: our annual ceremony to celebrate the very finest achievements in the last 12 months of videogaming. First, raise a glass of your chosen beverage as we count down to our most illustrious prize, the GamesMaster Game Of The Year. A little housekeeping: the criteria for entry is that all games must have launched in the last 12 months. Also, they aren't ranked by review scores, rather through heated discussions between the GM team and our band of merry critics. Disagree? That's OK, we forgive you. Feel free to let us know why!

10

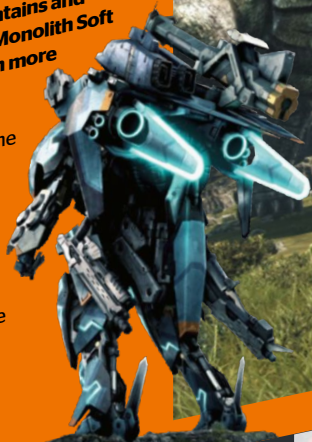
Format Wii U Developer Monolith Soft Publisher Nintendo

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES X

X MARKS THE SPOT

This was the year of burning virtual shoe-leather, but how many of these gargantuan sandboxes let you fly giant mechs over alien mountains and under airborne space whales? Yes, Monolith Soft has done it again, delivering an even more jaw-dropping world than the first game's.

With its seamless vistas and equally vivid wildlife, the planet Mira is a wondrous place to explore, but it's nothing compared to the feeling of taking down a 200ft tall dinosaur with little more than a knife and a rifle. Xenoblade already had a brilliant combat system, but X perfects it, pumping up ranged combat and adding a 'Soul Voice' system that forces a level of party interplay that few JRPGs have mastered. It's a game built to challenge tired genre conventions, showing you don't need a ridiculous haircut and a mopey backstory to create an utterly absorbing piece of gaming gold.



Format PS4, PC Developer Psyonix Publisher Psyonix

ROCKET LEAGUE

REAL MADRID 0, CAR-CELONA 5

Words no one said, ever: "What the world needs is a sequel to Supersonic Acrobatic Rocket-Powered Battle-Cars." And yet here we are with said follow-up to 2009's plucky PS3 effort rightly entrenched among the most impressive standout offerings of 2015. Move over, FIFA. Hit the showers, PES. This is 2015's best football game. What makes it so great? Oh, only everything.

Take the locked match length of five minutes: time enough to sustain one-sided thrashings, drama-packed comebacks and all things in between, yet sufficiently brief to have you muttering 'just one more game' into the witching hour and beyond. And every second of those 300 is a test of both brains and reactions: zipping along walls to smack a cross into the box, flinging yourself desperately at loose ball as it scuds across an open goal, haring back along a chain of boost pods in the vain hope of deflecting an opposition salvo, and an almighty swear.

As colourful as it is customisable, as breathless as it is strategic, Rocket League is a callback to the classic sports hybrids of yesteryear - Speedball 2, Mutant League Hockey, and so on - that improves upon them all. Its rapid levelling indoctrinates new players brilliantly swiftly, yet the tactical nuance on show in a 4-by-4 online match featuring seasoned competitors equates to a home course in High Energy Physics. For now and the foreseeable, it's a constant itch you'll never tire of scratching.

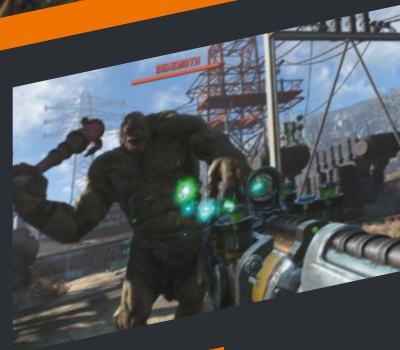
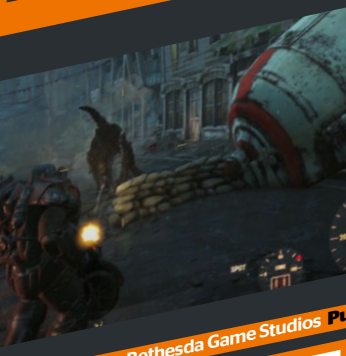
8

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

Format PS4, XO, PC, 360 Developer Crystal Dynamics Publisher Square Enix

Watch out, Nathan Drake. At the rate Lara's rebooted adventures are improving, she may have usurped your crown by the time Crystal Dynamics takes on a third Raider. This latest entry is one of the year's most exhilarating adventures, with a renewed emphasis on exploring the unknown and battling some seriously ticked off wildlife that helps recapture the spirit of her PS1 classics.

The game's rejigged setting also helps amp up excitement. Croft's Siberian playground is as deftly designed as it is dangerous. Whether it's using broadside arrows to climb frost-covered cliffs, or swimming around sprawling subterranean challenge tombs, the environment syncs up perfectly with your heroine's excellent puzzle and platforming skills. The latter is one area where Lara has already surpassed Uncharted. Rise's climbing sections are rarely less than a joy, thanks to brilliantly tactile controls - helped no end by the Xbox One's rumbling Impulse triggers. Combine the ass-kicking archeologist's robust jumpy bits with solid shooting and several spectacular setpieces, and this is easily one of the strongest (albeit temporary) exclusives of the current generation.



Format PS4, XO, PC Developer Bethesda Game Studios Publisher Bethesda Softworks

FALLOUT 4

FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN

Bethesda's latest may be a sprawling RPG adventure, but it's also a celebration of carefully-engineered serendipity, jam-packed with precisely-designed moments draped in the outward appearance of happy accident. One minute you're wandering the Commonwealth on the way to your next mission; the next, you're donning the costume of TV vigilante the Silver Shroud and dispensing corny quips and tommy gun justice to raider thugs in a wonderfully bonkers, and totally optional, sidequest.

The wasteland seems to hide these skewed little stories under every crumbling highway and dilapidated roof, chunks of wonderful hidden narrative made all the more special for their lack of signposting. And playing through these chance encounters has never felt better, thanks to improvements to almost every aspect of Fallout's moment-to-moment gameplay. The shooting is more precise, the gear is often gleefully bonkers, and VATS is at once more demanding and rewarding than ever. Bethesda's creaking tech may be groaning beneath the strain of current-gen expectation at this point, but there's simply no arguing with the scale of the developer's achievement in bringing these weird tales of the Commonwealth to life.





6

Format Wii U Developer Nintendo Publisher Nintendo

SUPER MARIO MAKER



MAKING LEVELS THE MIYAMOTO WAY

Nintendo may make it look easy, but this level-creating game makes us realise quite how devilishly tricky it is to craft a classic Mario stage. Luckily, with its brilliantly intuitive interface and liberal smearing of Mushroom Kingdom charm, it never fails to keep smiles plastered across our faces, even as the realisation creeps up on us that our latest creation is... well, just a little bit rubbish.

By spanning a whole spectrum of the cheerful plumber's greatest hits, it manages to perfectly tickle our nostalgia glands too - even if it did (perhaps wisely) skip over the turnip-chucking era. We didn't know how much we'd been hankering for a spot of old-fashioned Ninety platforming until we first dove into its churning sea of user-designed levels.

Thanks to its already dedicated fanbase, and the many amateur designers with rather more talent than we can muster, Super Mario Maker feels like a portal into a universe of infinite new Mario games. That's a hell of a proposition - and just the shot in the arm the ailing Wii U needed to get us dusting off our GamePads. And hey, maybe with enough practice even we'll be able to put together something that'd make Miyamoto proud.



5

Format PC, Mobile Developer Sam Barlow Publisher Sam Barlow

HER STORY

A ROOM WITH AN INTERVIEW

If you'd asked us in January for the likelihood that an FMV detective game would find its way onto GM's 2015 awards list, we would've given long, long odds. But this is a special case, couching its twisting tale within a bold experiment in non-linear narrative, the result as much a rumination on storytelling and identity as it is police procedural.

As you investigate the jumbled, fragmented interview room clips, you find your own unique path through its tangled spaghetti bolognese of deliciously interlocking mysteries, different from every other player's. As our frantic post-game office chats proved, this could even lead to wildly different interpretations of the story, as you each decide which of the interviewee's answers to believe and which to dismiss. Despite its starkly minimalist, subdued style and one-woman cast, this is one of the most engaging and genuinely compelling experiences of the year, and one quite unlike anything else out there.



4

Format PS4 Developer From Software Publisher Sony

BLOODBORNE

IT CAN MAKE YOU SOULS AGAIN

An army of Souls fans flocked to this, the first game since Dark Souls to have the influential director, Hidetaka Miyazaki, at the helm. It's a much more action-orientated affair, with shields given only a cursory inclusion as an in-joke for series vets, and the expectation that players will leap face-first into fights rather than backing off slowly and cowering in a corner.

And it works. Gloriously so. Action flows at an intense pace, almost, at times, at the very brink of our pitiful human minds' ability to even perceive or react. Its collection of boss fights, from the tragic Father Gascoigne to the crushing, breathless battles with the three Shadows Of Yharnam, is instantly memorable, and tantalising in its escalating challenge. Well, you didn't expect an easy ride, did you?

Series stalwarts might point at the toned-down amount of weapons on offer compared with the Souls series entries, but in place of that complexity came a streamlined, heavily Lovecraft-inspired action horror masterpiece. Nowhere else this year, or in the foreseeable future, will we find a game so well balanced between delivering unnerving atmosphere and truly compelling combat. Plus, true to Miyazaki's style, the story is so layered it'll have us still digging for clues until... well, until we get our hands on that new DLC.



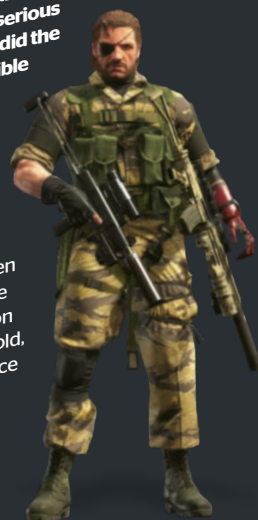
Format PS4, XO, PC Developer Kojima Productions Publisher Konami

METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

SNAKE SNEAKS INTO THE SUNSET IN SCINTILLATING STYLE

Bow before the new king of sandbox stealth. Hideo Kojima and Konami may have parted ways - putting Snake's future in serious doubt - but if this was to be Big Boss' final salute, then boy, did the legendary espionage agent ever go out in style. An incredible engine, exquisite controls, a boundless sense of playfulness; never before has a stealth game offered players such incredibly empowering freedom of choice.

While The Phantom Pain may lack the grand set pieces of its predecessors (you'll find no three minute ladder climbs here), it more than makes up for it by affording its audience an astonishing amount of agency. Do you take that enemy encampment by sniping all of the bad men from 300ft away, or do you go in with your trusty pooch D-Dog, and let the murderous mutt slice their throats? Fire an RPG to wipe out a tank battalion or wait for a sandstorm, then sneak up and plaster that Panzer with C4? Bold, beautiful, and superbly constructed, Metal Gear Solid V places player choice above all, and it's bloody brilliant because of it.





Format PS4, X0, PS3, 360 Developer Bungie Publisher Activision

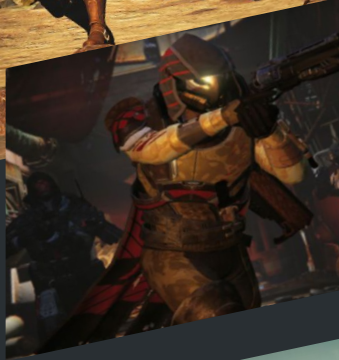
DESTINY: THE TAKEN KING

THE FIRST RULE OF LIGHT CLUB IS...

Bungie's shooter-RPG didn't have the best start. For a year, it left players to feel their way through a bewildering endgame where you fought the random loot table as much as any aliens, and ignored its hollow story. The Taken King smashes those problems to dust like a comet, while leaving intact the excellent gunplay that's kept the game in disc trays since 2014.

The solution was overhauling the mystifying Light stat, which both measures and gates your progress, so that every gear drop potentially matters. Now your ascent up Destiny's formerly intractable progression curve is slow but steady. Most nights of play yield either a better item, or at least one good enough to feed to your favourite armour or gun. A cavalcade of quests, meanwhile, yield predictable, quantifiable results, preventing the need to run the same old content on a loop.

All this means that once you've enjoyed the playfully told campaign missions and defeated Big Bad Oryx, your path to Destiny's crown jewels, the raids, is paved with entertaining gunplay with purpose. And, as ever, when Bungie asks you to assemble a fireteam and solve problems as well as trade bullets, Destiny sparks into something truly magical. It's an incredible overhaul, and a strong start for a second year of cooperative gunplay that kept us entranced even back when it was struggling to find its feet.



GM Feature

On The Cover!



Format PS4, XO, PC Developer CD Projekt Red Publisher Bandai Namco

THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

WE JUST CAN'T STOP WHITE WOLFING IT DOWN

In the run up to launch, it seemed almost impossible that this RPG sequel could live up to the hype. Bafflingly, it actually surpassed it - and we still can't figure out how CD Projekt Red managed it.

It's a game of both colossal scale, and stunning detail; a sprawling open world that's all killer and no filler. Forget collecting ten wolf pelts - even the most seemingly insignificant of sidequests tell their own fully-realised, human stories. Climbing towers can get stuffed too - exploring the world of The Witcher 3 isn't about sweeping up icons on a map, but a genuine, organic journey of discovery through truly beautiful locations.

As if that wasn't enough, it's still receiving an incredible amount of post-release support, regularly being refined and expanded with patches, free DLC, and expansions - a welcome contrast to the dodgy money-grubbing that tainted so many other great games this year. We don't envy the studios developing in The Witcher 3's wake. It's set a bar so high it's getting in the way of migratory geese. A deserving winner of our highest prize.





"IT'S ABSOLUTELY INCREDIBLE TO BE ON THE LIPS OF SO MANY GAMERS AND VIDEOGAME CRITICS. WHEN YOU COME AND MEET US AT GAMING EXPOS, WE'RE PRETTY MUCH LIKE EVERY OTHER GAMER OUT THERE - PASSIONATE ABOUT OUR HOBBY, ABOUT PLAYING GAMES, WITH THE DIFFERENCE THAT WE ALSO MAKE THEM. AN AWARD IS SOMETHING THAT ESSENTIALLY SAYS 'GREAT JOB', AND WHEN YOU THINK OF ALL THAT TIME YOU SPENT POLISHING SOMETHING TO BE AS PERFECT AS YOU CAN MAKE IT, AND THEN GET AWARDED FOR IT, WELL, IT'S MASSIVELY EMPOWERING.

THAT'S WHY WE'D LIKE TO THANK EVERYONE FOR THEIR SUPPORT. GAMERS MIGHT NOT ALWAYS BE AWARE OF THAT, BUT EACH KIND WORD, EACH QUESTION OR INTERACTION ON OUR FORUMS AND SOCIAL MEDIA, THIS IS WHAT POWERS US TO MAKE EVEN BETTER GAMES. THANK YOU!"

CD PROJEKT RED



UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

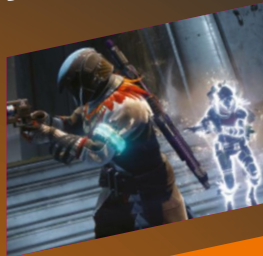
SO WHO FOUGHT HARDEST AND SHOUTED LOUDEST FOR WHAT IN THIS YEAR'S GOTY CHARTS?



Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman
EDITOR

- 1 Destiny: The Taken King
- 2 The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt
- 3 Soma

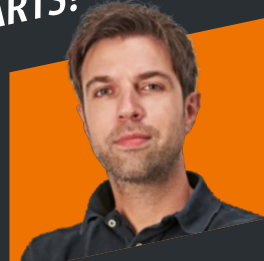
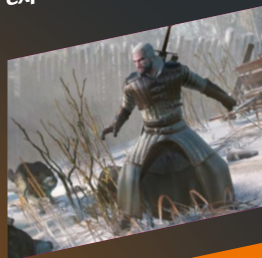
"Weirdly we were pretty unanimous this year when it came to the top of the heap. Destiny managed to convince me, one of the game's loudest critics upon its launch last year, to sink worryingly long hours into its myriad new systems with The Taken King. Harder, however, was convincing the team that Life Is Strange isn't all that great. Which it really isn't."



Robin Valentine
PRODUCTION EDITOR

- 1 The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt
- 2 Rocket League
- 3 Tales From The Borderlands

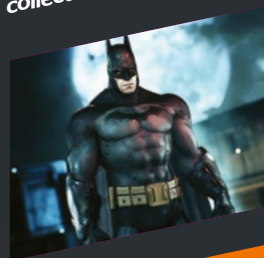
"This was a marvelous year for videogame storytelling - from Tales From The Borderlands, to Her Story, to Life Is Strange - and The Witcher 3's twisted tales in particular blew me away. That didn't stop me also falling head over heels for the wordless Rocket League, however; one of the most focused and perfect multiplayer experiences in years."



Sam Freeman
ART EDITOR

- 1 Batman: Arkham Knight
- 2 The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt
- 3 Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain

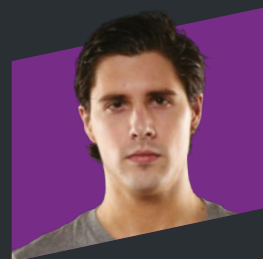
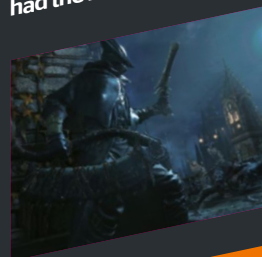
"This was a close call, but my top pick has to be Batman: Arkham Knight. It's the best Batman game to date - no small achievement. The open world, missions, gadgets, and storyline are pretty much flawless, a self-confessed comic book nerd's dream! Rocksteady can say a fond farewell to the franchise with its collective head held high."



Matt Elliott
COMMISSIONING EDITOR

- 1 Bloodborne
- 2 Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain
- 3 Attila: Total War

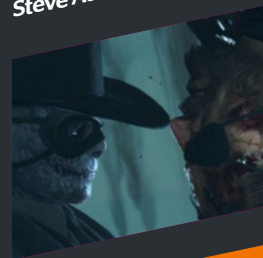
"It's strange professing love for something that caused me so much hurt - like marrying the bully who wiped bogies on my school bag - but I adore Bloodborne's harrowing, Lovecraftian adventure because of the hardships, not in spite of them. And I accidentally beat the final boss wearing a brassy ballgown and a sparkly tiara, so in the end, it even had the last laugh..."



Ben Griffin
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

- 1 Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain
- 2 Bloodborne
- 3 FIFA 16

"My favourite game of 2015 is one in which you strap balloons to dazed men, train a dog to knife-fight, and puff on E-cigs. Metal Gear Solid V's mad brilliance (hunt a bear! Listen to cassettes!) means I'm still finding stuff to do. My latest distraction is customising my chopper's entrance music on PC - my Ride Of The Valkyries is Stone Cold Steve Austin's theme."



THE TOP 30

AND HERE ARE ALL THE REST, THE 30 BEST GAMES OF 2015 THAT YOU'LL KICK YOURSELF IF YOU DON'T PLAY.

- 1 The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt
- 2 Destiny: The Taken King
- 3 Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain
- 4 Bloodborne
- 5 Her Story
- 6 Super Mario Maker
- 7 Fallout 4
- 8 Rise Of The Tomb Raider
- 9 Rocket League
- 10 Xenoblade Chronicles X

- 11 Splatoon
- 12 Elite: Dangerous
- 13 Kerbal Space Program
- 14 Soma
- 15 Everybody's Gone To The Rapture
- 16 Tales From The Borderlands
- 17 Monster Hunter Ultimate 4
- 18 This War Of Mine
- 19 Batman: Arkham Knight
- 20 Halo 5: Guardians

- 21 Total War: Attila
- 22 Crypt Of The Necrodancer
- 23 Kalimba
- 24 Project CARS
- 25 Axiom Verge
- 26 Steins;Gate
- 27 FIFA 16
- 28 Heroes Of The Storm
- 29 Until Dawn
- 30 Life Is Strange



ALTERNATIVE AWARDS

BECAUSE THERE'S ALWAYS ANOTHER GAME WORTH CELEBRATING... OR NOT...

2016'S ONE TO WATCH



Firewatch

Recognise this? That's right, it's the same winner as last year! It turns out Campo Santo's enticing, story-led forest fire prevention adventure will take just a little longer in the oven. With a similarly tactile world to that found in Soma, Firewatch looks to pack a David Fincher-esque thriller quality alongside lush visuals.

MOST SMASHED PADS Rom, The Vacuous Spider

Oh, you eight-legged bum cleft, how we hate you so. With a huge plasmatic attack which forced us into baby spider swarming range, this mid-game boss encounter from Bloodborne had all the haemoglobin in our systems boiling over with fury. Until it was eventually bested, providing the biggest euphoria rush of the year.

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 5

It was a bold move on Activision's part, dubbing this the official fifth entry in the beloved series, and it set certain... expectations. Meeting expectations wasn't THPS5's strong suit; in fact, we're still trying to work out what its strong suit was. Making plastic board-wobbling disaster Tony Hawk: Ride look less crap by comparison, perhaps?

READER'S CHOICE!

Where you tell us that we got it all wrong...

MOST WANTED REVIVAL



Square Replay

If Rare can do it, put 30 of its best games (except the Ninty-owned ones) into one wholesome package, then surely other developers can too? Imagine that. Buying a single game collection with all the Final Fantasys, SaGas, and Manas in one place. Throw in Bushido Blade and - woof - that there is an insta-buy!

MOMENT OF THE YEAR Sony's E3 Press Conference

You'd be forgiven for still being in the process of pulling your flopping jaw up off the floor after this summer's frankly ludicrous salvo of awesome from the PlayStation purveyor. The Last Guardian! Shenmue III! Final Fantasy VII Remake?! The biggest task ahead for Sony is to top that lot next year. Impossible, surely?

BEST SURPRISE Life Is Strange

This episodic adventure didn't have the strongest of starts with its first episode, and we certainly didn't expect it to find its feet so quickly. The second instalment was a pleasant surprise - the third blew us away. From humble beginnings, Life Is Strange quickly blossomed into something brilliantly, unexpectedly unique.

BEST FAN PROJECT



Chatroulette FPS

Realm Pictures' interactive FPS experience is a work of evil genius, springing a mad adventure on unsuspecting chatters. There's even a level two now - see it at <http://bit.ly/gmlevel2>. "We're honoured to receive this," says Shaz Abdullah. "We can't wait to do level three!"

SEQUEL, PLEASE! Grow Home

From a studio becoming sadly renowned for pumping out risk averse sequels, or for riffing on tired open-world formulae, this goody bag full of pleasingly innovative puzzle platforming was just what the doctor ordered, should you be suffering from a hankering case of the 3D platformer shakes. Grow Home 2 would make us do a jig.

BEST NEWCOMER Splatoon

With its instant accessibility, effortlessly charming style, and brilliant new take on multiplayer shooter gameplay, this gooey Nintendo offering was an absolute breath of fresh air when it launched earlier this year - and with regular updates since then, its once thin frame is now gloriously plump with new maps, modes, and more.

1 The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

You've made your preferred choice of gruff, bearded warrior abundantly clear, with Geralt receiving almost twice as many votes as Big Boss in our highly scientific poll. We're chuffed that you lot had as brilliant a time exploring The Witcher 3's world as we did this year - top of our list, and top of yours too.

Survey conducted on 13 November



SET THE WORLD ON FIRE

| 01 DECEMBER 2015

JUST CAUSE 3

Just Cause 3 © 2015 Square Enix Ltd. All rights reserved. Developed by Avalanche Studios. Published by Square Enix Ltd. Just Cause 3 and the Just Cause logo are trademarks of Square Enix Ltd. Square Enix and the Square Enix logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Square Enix Holdings Co. Ltd. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks and "PS" and the PlayStation Network logo are trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners.

18
www.pegi.info

**SECURE THE EXCLUSIVE
WEAPONISED VEHICLE PACK AND
FINAL ARGUMENT SNIPER RIFLE**



Pre-order from
PlayStation.Store

PS4



HEAR ONLY WHAT MATTERS

IN-EAR STEREO HEADSET



Noise reducing AudioShield technology



Built-in microphone



Compatible with PS4, PS Vita, Smartphones
& tablets

CONNECTS DIRECTLY
TO YOUR DUALSHOCK®4
WIRELESS CONTROLLER



OUT
NOW



 PS4™

Find out more:
playstation.com/PS4

© 2015 Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "PlayStation", "PS4" and "PS4" are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All other content, product names, trademarks, service marks and/or copyright material are trademarks and/or copyright material of their respective owners. All rights reserved.

IndieMaster

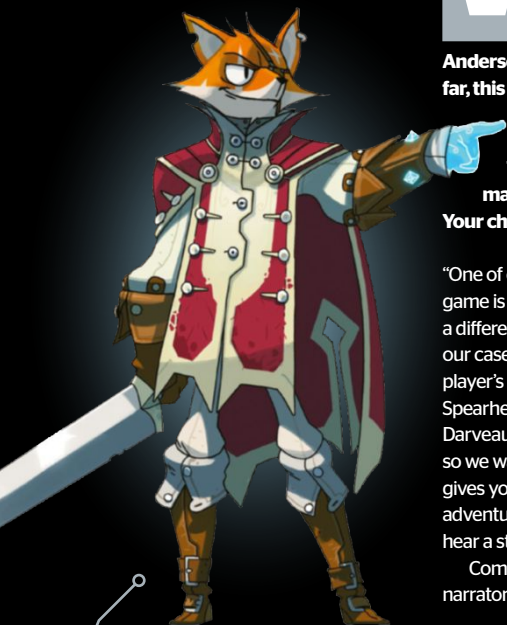
The **Best** Of The Indie Scene!

The game is narrated by Julian Casey, who's also starring as Uncle Jack in the Joy-addled *We Happy Few*.

Who is...



Based in Montreal, indie studio Spearhead sports a trio of triple-A talents. Founded by Assassin's Creed 3 design director Simon Darveau, it also boasts AC2 and Dead Space game director Malik Boukhira, and Army Of Two dev director Atul Mehra. The team's first game was the critter-packed PlayStation 4 and PC co-op puzzler *Tiny Brains*.



There's something inherently charming about cartoon foxes. Unlike real foxes, which seem to spend the majority of their spare time shrieking at nothing.

Format PS4, PC Developer Spearhead Games ETA Early 2016 Web <http://bit.ly/gmstories>

#1 STORIES: THE PATH OF DESTINIES

Once upon a time is the best

When someone offers an adventure with a swashbuckling fox, you've got to be on board. We've seen enough Wes

Anderson movies to know that and, so far, this action-RPG looks a little bit fantastic. Its bright isometric style is beautiful, and the Telltale-ish focus on story makes it an intriguing prospect. Your choices drive the entire narrative.

"One of our main inspirations with this game is the idea of a magic book that tells a different story each time you open it. In our case, the story changes based on the player's choices and actions," explains Spearhead Games co-founder Simon Darveau. "It's also an epic adventure story, so we wanted to create a game that really gives you that feeling of being on an adventure. Play as the adventurer, not just hear a story about an adventurer."

Complete with a Bastion-style narrator, who even performs all the

voices, *Stories* wants to tell you a ripping yarn, and Spearhead has revealed that a current build of the game has 32 different endings. "It's around that number," says Darveau. "Although in *Stories*, an ending does not necessarily mean the end of the story. And a 'playthrough' is not always what we usually mean by that... Like any good adventurer, Reynardo gets to explore various exotic places, fight bad guys, do some swashbuckling, use his magic hookshot, and find hidden treasures. He can even get the opportunity to rescue - or was it kidnap? - a definitely-not-helpless princess."

Fox hit up

Darveau isn't revealing the specifics of those choices but it's not just a case of taking a different corridor to get to the same enemy fights. Your decisions can mean life or death - no taking your furry companions for granted here. "The

choices do not simply lead to different endings, they lead to different stories, right from the start," he explains. "These stories' flavour and tone can vary widely, depending the choices you make. It can be anything from goofy comedy to Lovecraftian horror." Chuckles and Cthulhu in one game?

One spoiler-free element the team is happy to discuss in detail is the foxy lead himself. "Reynardo is a brave, but impetuous, fox. Like all heroes he can be counted on to do the heroic thing," says Darveau. "He can't be counted on to do the wise thing, though. When his blood is up, he thinks with his heart, not his head, and he's not nearly as sly as he thinks he is. His cleverest plans often blow up in his face. But his heart is pure, and that attracts good people to him - even good people among his enemies. It also enrages bad people around him - even bad people who are among his friends."

"WE WANTED TO CREATE A GAME THAT GIVES YOU THAT FEELING OF BEING ON AN ADVENTURE"



Don't be deceived by those easy-on-the-eye visuals. While Reynardo works better with friends, there's a way you can actually kill his trusted friend Lapino in the very first scene. That's... surprisingly dark.



The environments are packed with treasure to loot and range from the sweet bright colours of Saturday cartoons to a shadowier vibe.

When it comes to character inspiration, there's a definite Star Wars vibe. Why decide between a Jedi and Harrison Ford when you can have both? "Reynardo has Luke Skywalker's heart and Han Solo's wit," says Darveau. "He's sarcastic, but never cynical. Only if all was lost would he ever abandon his post, and then only for love. For all that, he's pretty impressed with himself. Reynardo is probably going to make a great deal of loot on this adventure. That's not why he does it, but he's not going to give it away, either."

Darveau continues: "Really, though, aside from truth and justice and all that, his goal is to have wonderful stories to tell his grandkids, if he ever remembers to have kids in the first place, which would be the thing that scares him most, if he ever thought about it, so he doesn't." If that isn't one of the most charming indie quotes you've ever read

in the pages of GM, we'll eat the last three issues' IndieMasters.

Book lively

Whether you're opening chests or travelling with companions, the narrator accompanies the action, seamlessly moving from voice to voice. What was behind this decision for the team?

"Using a narrator fits very well with our fairytale book concept," explains Darveau. "But also, it's a great way to blend seamlessly narrative and gameplay, as well as enable the narration to react abundantly to the

player's actions and decisions, while keeping things within an indie budget." Our charming fox isn't just wandering around making decisions though. He's got enemies to fight in a swish, hack-and-slash style. In fact the team informs us that its combat has been inspired by Batman's crunchy combos.



"Using his Sword Fu techniques, Reynardo has a very fast-paced combat style ideal for fighting large groups of enemies," confirms Darveau. "He can quickly dash from one foe to the next and chain combos among multiple enemies. Throughout the game, he can unlock new abilities, as well as equip himself with powerful magic weapons that add both pure destruction and many tactical options - crowd control, mobility, etc. The result is a very fluid combat system, that looks great and plays great."

The environments Reynardo explores are beautiful and atmospheric, with a brightness that may be deceptive given the teased dark decisions. And there's a reason our hero looks like he belongs in the kind of TV we once watched wrapped up in a duvet on a Saturday morning. "The visuals take inspiration from both western fairytales and manga," says Darveau. "That, or Dogtanian And The Three Muskehounds." We'll get to make our own decisions for Reynardo's adventures when it arrives on PS4 and PC next year. In the meantime, all you need to do is decide whether or not to turn the page. (Hint: your adventure stops here otherwise.) ■



The 60 Second Pitch

Getting foxy with co-founder **Malik Boukhira**

Stories is an action-RPG set in a vibrant fairytale universe, filled with floating islands, airships, and flamboyant, colorful magic. Our hero is Reynardo the Fox, a sky corsair in a bit of a bind. He's a clever rogue, but he's not as clever as he thinks. He's got himself sucked into a rebellion against a mad emperor, and now he's got fateful choices to make. Should he rescue his oldest friend, the shiftless Lapino? Wield a gem cursed by a dead god? Or resurrect a weapon lost at the beginning of time? Worse, he's still in love with the emperor's adopted daughter, who he met in Sword Fu school. He's got dozens of ways to screw this up; but can he find a way to win his war? Reynardo fights against impossible odds, knowing that the fate of everything he holds dear rests on his shoulders. Stories: The Path Of Destinies is madcap epic fantasy where each choice you make takes you into a different story. But each story - some dark, some romantic, all action-packed - is true in its way, and will lead you to victory if you pay enough attention...

IndieMaster

The **Best** Of The Indie Scene!

Format PS4, PC Developer William Chyr ETA 2016 Web <http://bit.ly/gmmanifoldgarden>

#2 MANIFOLD GARDEN

Climbing the stairs into impossible space

Ever spent a little too long gazing at an M.C. Escher painting, until it makes your mind feel like it's stretching in multiple directions? Yeah, now imagine it moving and filled with puzzles. Don't worry, that smell is just your frontal cortex frying slightly. Previously revealed as *Relativity*, *Manifold Garden* is ready to serve up your brain with chips.

"I've always been a fan of M.C. Escher's work," explains artist and creator William Chyr. "I wanted to make a game that was based on some of the ideas he explored. His print 'Relativity' seemed like it would lend itself well to a game mechanic, with the player being able to change gravity and walk up walls. What is now *Manifold Garden* is pretty much completely different from what I started with. There is still the mechanic of changing gravity, but that's not really the main focus. It's much more about exploring impossible geometry (like the three-torus), unusual physics, and what kind of architecture could exist in this space."

Geometry wars

Now that you're back from Googling three-torus, it's time to talk puzzles and physics. Think *Portal*, but with some seriously mind-bending twists. "A big part of the game is that all the physics systems are consistent with one another," says Chyr. "The geometry in the game wraps around on itself, so if you fall off a ledge, there's a world exactly like the one you

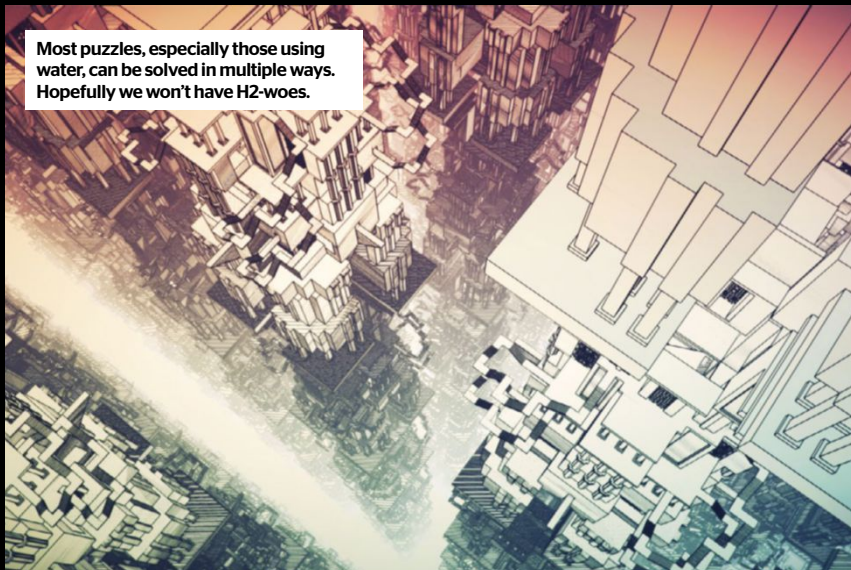


The game also draws inspiration from uniquely surreal gardening sim *Starseed Pilgrim*, and atmospheric adventure *NaissanceE*.

fell from beneath you, and you can land right back there. If you drop a box off the edge, you'll see it fall down from above, and when a stream of water falls off the edge, it'll also come back down from above, forming a water loop."

If you're already thinking this sounds like it could get far too confusing, don't worry - William's done some serious experimenting to get the experience at the level he wants. "Getting the difficulty curve right for the puzzles is definitely something that has taken a long time to refine," he explains. "The first level of the game has been playtested over 1,000 times at this point, and been redesigned around 40 times. The game is about challenging players to reach for higher levels of understanding, but not through execution or tedium." Gravity, water, and switches that grow on trees are only a few of the interesting toys you'll get to play with in this simultaneously wonderful and unsettling world. Keep an eye out for *Manifold Garden* sprouting up next year. ■

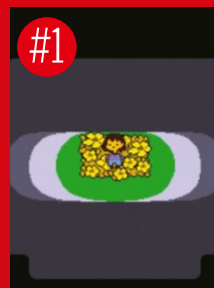
Most puzzles, especially those using water, can be solved in multiple ways. Hopefully we won't have H2-woes.



Small... But Perfectly Formed

The best indies to give a loved one this Christmas

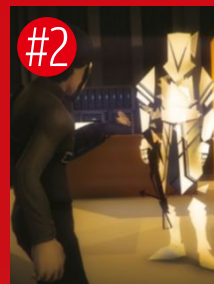
#1



UNDERTALE

25th December. 8:33am. Does your bleary-eyed other half receive underwear - making everyone else in the room blush - or the far-less-likely-to-shock-the-family *Undertale*? It's a no-brainer. This is a wonderful love letter to JRPGs, and its soundtrack is a bonus gift that keeps on giving.

#2



VOLUME

Mike Bithell's stealth-a-thon means a different kind of Christmas stalking for the indie-game fiend in your family. It's also an ideal way to block out the sounds of what happens when your egg-nogged siblings find the Singstar microphones that they haven't touched since last year. Headset engaged.

#3



PLAGUE INC EVOLVED

Give some perspective to a friend struck down with the winter vomiting bug. At least it isn't a virulent bacteria that spreads through the air and liquefies all your organs. And killing the world from their sickbed is sure to make them feel better. Merry Christmas.

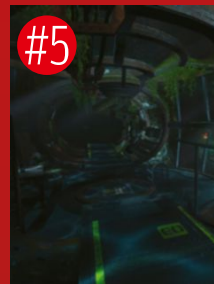
#4



THE ESCAPISTS: THE WALKING DEAD

Trapped for days with the slaving undead, no hope of escape, and far too many mince pies? So is Rick Grimes. Well, except for the mince pies part. Get some tips on how to get away from the whole family with this zombie horde-avoiding survival adventure.

#5



SOMA

Perfect for that one person in your life that has a yearly existential crisis just as the Queen arrives on the Beeb on the 25th. Do machines have Christmas? Would they know what it is to feel truly festive? Perhaps Rudolph would be a shining light in the darkness underwater? ■



Format PC Dev Grey Alien Games ETA 2016 Web <http://bit.ly/gmshadowhand>

#3 SHADOWHAND

Slay your cards right

Play for Solitaire on Windows 10? Nah. There are far better card games out there, and here's one that's seriously addictive. From the team behind Regency Solitaire on PC comes Shadowhand, a rollicking tale of a young aristocrat who also happens to be a highwaywoman.

"We've designed Shadowhand to have Solitaire-style card play at its heart," explains game designer Helen Carmichael. "We've created a compelling, new combat solitaire which involves turn-based battles against a range of opponents - Shadowhand is a card battling adventure. You select weapon and outfit cards to use in battle, and can create mini-decks of special ability cards as well."

Gun play

Yep, *combat solitaire*, and it's hard to stop. To earn points to attack your opponent, you must strategically select the correct card - either one

lower or higher - to keep a run going. The more you add, the more points you'll get to attack, with personalised tools. "You can customise weapons, costumes, and other accessories such as bombs and potions via an inventory screen," says director Jake Birkett. "This not only changes the look of your character, but also her combat stats. There's also an XP system that can be used to upgrade various abilities to help Shadowhand gain an edge over her opponents."

Plus, a narrative spins out as you progress. "The seed of the idea came from our last game which was set in 1812," says Carmichael. "One of our older characters suggests she may have had an exciting past. Travelling back in time in our imaginations by around 40 years took us to her youth, when highwaymen roamed England. Jake had a flash of inspiration - thinking about titles like Puzzle Quest and Bookworm Adventures, along with the popularity of turn-based card games, like Hearthstone. What if we brought turn-based combat to solitaire?" Spider is frankly boring now. ■



Lady Darkmoor AKA Shadowhand's story is allegedly "rife with intrigue and skulduggery". To be honest, they had us at 'rife'.



Format PC Developer Fishing Cactus ETA 2016 Web <http://bit.ly/gmepistory>

#4 EPISTORY - TYPING CHRONICLES

Don't get lost for words

If there's something that Typing Of The Dead Overkill didn't quite get it's that there's more to hammering words into a keyboard than taking potshots at zombies. Epistory is the tale of an author who has some serious writer's block, and asks her muse to help. Playing as said muse - a girl riding on the back of a three-tailed fox - you must smash down that creative wall by exploring a world where your only weapons are words.

The beautiful Tearaway-style papery world is filled with treasure to loot, enemies to battle, and puzzles to solve, all by typing the words required into

your keyboard. Small enemies might only take a three-letter word to remove, while bigger ones will require a better vocabulary to beat.

Paper cut

As the narrative progresses, the writer's story begins to unfold across previously blank pages, and it's all down to you and your adventures. Helpfully, if you aren't super speedy, the game even adjusts its difficulty on the fly, so there's no need to practice too many 'quick brown fox' reps. It's already playable on Steam via Early Access, but the dev team is planning more dungeons, extra puzzles, a complete story, and arenas with leaderboards so you can challenge your friends. RSI here we come. ■

"SMASH DOWN A CREATIVE WALL BY EXPLORING A WORLD WHERE YOUR ONLY WEAPONS ARE WORDS"



The 3D world comes to life like unfolding origami, unfolding into an adventure both beautiful and educational. Yes, we said the E word.

MinecraftMaster

The Most Block-busting Builds!



“My advice for being a YouTuber is to focus on the videos and not YouTube. It’s easy to get overwhelmed with YouTube stats and trying to get views. It’s a lot more fun to put all of your energy just into making great videos.”

“My first experience with Minecraft was my first episode in My Lovely World. It’s a long-running series that I still do to this day. The complete freedom and possibilities were what got me hooked.”



“Stampy Longhead was originally the name of a character in an animation I made at school.”

FIRST CLASS STAMPY

Meeting the man behind the millions of YouTube views



Pushing seven million subscribers, and with some videos hitting a stratospheric 40 million hits, Stampy Longhead is a bone fide YouTube star. Minecraft is his chosen domain of expertise, and so what better way to galvanise our new look Minecraft Master than by sitting down with one of the game’s most celebrated celebrities? Take it away, Stampy! ■

“I think that people mainly enjoy the humour and stories that I tell in my videos. They also come for a source of inspiration when they might not be sure what they want to build.”

"I think the Minecraft audience has stayed engaged for so long because there's always something new to do in the game. The community and developers are always adding something fresh."

"YouTube is so important to Minecraft because for many it's where they first hear about the game. It's the most popular videogame on YouTube, and that really helps to spread the word about it. It also encourages people to continue to play, because they want to replicate what they see in videos."

"The gaming industry has changed in so many ways since I started. YouTube (and YouTubers) have really started having an impact on the success of games. You can see many more games targeted directly at YouTubers in the hope that they will play them. The rise of free-to-play and mobile games is also having dramatic effects on the entire industry."

"Some series I can record several videos in one day. Bigger videos can take over a week of work on just one video. 95% of what I do is planning."

"My proudest Minecraft achievement is My Lovely World. I've been building it for so long. I'm proud that I'm able to continue coming up with ideas for new things to add."

"My favourite block to build out of is sandstone. I love the texture, and few people use it. It also reminds me of white chocolate."

"The most difficult thing I've built is a working treadmill. I also spent a lot of time building a giant frog that I'm rather proud of."



Stampy's got a new book out this Christmas, with plenty of tips, tricks, and other fun stuff inside. Check it out here: <http://bit.ly/gmstampy>



GM Reviews

The Final Verdict!

64 Assassin's Creed Syndicate



We've got the need... the need for Creed. Can a jaunt to London revitalise the aging franchise?

HOW WE SCORE

0-39 Awful Avoid it as you would a bullet with your name on.
40-59 Poor Major issues here that won't be solved with a hug.
60-69 Decent A mixed bag filled with sweets and sharp stones.
70-79 Good Some flaws, but still a very enjoyable experience.
80-89 Excellent Buy it, love it, thank us when you're done.
90-100 Outstanding A rare and essential piece of brilliance.

The small print: We rate games in comparison to what else is available on the same system, in the same genre, and for the same format at the time of release. So this year's FIFA might score less than a FIFA from three years ago, but still be a better game. Because time, and our expectations, move on. Hey, you're smart, you get it...



Not awarded based simply on score, but rather given to games that possess a special blend of qualities. For instant classics that you won't regret owning.

Format PS4, XO (reviewed), PC **Publisher** Bethesda Softworks
Developer Bethesda Game Studios **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

FALLOUT 4

Now VATS entertainment



The tagline 'War never changes' has always seemed so ill-fitting for a series that's dedicated to life after the atomic blast. It's intended, of course, to suggest that conflict of some sort will always persist, even in the aftermath of nuclear armageddon. But given how thoroughly Bethesda updated

and reinvented this dormant franchise in 2008, a slogan grounded in constancy has come to seem somehow inappropriate. With *Fallout 3*, we discovered with some enthusiasm, the series had changed an awful lot. So much, in fact, that even seven years and a generational leap in console processing power can't quite reproduce the open-world awe that we experienced back at its launch.

Because *Fallout 4* is very much a continuation of the formula laid down in *Fallout 3*, consolidating its successes and refining its weaknesses rather than reinventing the franchise all over again. It's a refined romp through a previously unexplored area of the irradiated states of America, as you emerge from Vault 111 into a ravaged Massachusetts, and although this blasted landscape is undoubtedly hostile, it has weathered the nuclear storm rather better than the Capital Wasteland. The omnipresent brown of *Fallout 3* is now but one colour in a faded spectrum, and dreary ruins stand alongside proud but ramshackle survivors of the region's vibrant architectural tradition.

Look past those handsome derelicts, however, and you'll discover that the people of the New England Commonwealth are a fearful bunch, and that fear is centred on The Institute. This secretive scientific organisation has been working on robotics for generations, and has now seemingly mastered the

technology to produce synthetic androids which appear indistinguishable from humans. And since the 'synth' influx has coincided with a raft of suspicious disappearances, a spring of wariness and mistrust has flooded the settlements of the Commonwealth.

Lights, camera, faction

It's a rich premise that serves as the setup for philosophical pondering, some inspired side-quests, and a slightly limp main questline. It gets off to a strong start, to be sure, with a surprisingly effective emotional motivation for your adventure established in the opening hours. From there, you'll set out and discover the game's competing factions, including the fanatical Brotherhood Of Steel, the do-gooder Minutemen, and synth-rights activists The Railroad. Player choice is naturally a cornerstone of the game's

design, and you're able to flirt with any or all of these factions, simultaneously completing missions even for hardened rivals before cementing your allegiance to any one. In fact, we were able to pose as a true believer in one faction while secretly plotting their downfall with another feisty band. Disappointingly, the game failed to meaningfully acknowledge our brilliant betrayal, and as such, it felt more like we were exploiting ropey systems rather than engaging in compelling narrative intrigue.

In a more general sense, *Fallout 4*'s story has a tendency to tell you the consequences of your actions rather than offering you the opportunity to see them play out first hand. After 30 hours with the main storyline, you might expect your chosen faction to have visibly grown, developed, or changed in some meaningful sense. If so, you'll be disappointed. Similarly, the main campaign's ending, for all of its moments of weighty choice and apparent consequence, devolves into little more than shooting your way through room after room of factional baddies.

But the heart of any Bethesda RPG lies in its world and its side-quests, and on this front, *Fallout 4* delivers handsomely.

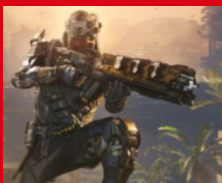


"THE PEOPLE ARE FEARFUL, AND THAT FEAR IS CENTRED ON THE SECRETIVE INSTITUTE"

Who's the best companion? Dogmeat for bites, Valentine for hacks, Deacon for looking good while lugging your stuff.



66 Call Of Duty: Black Ops III



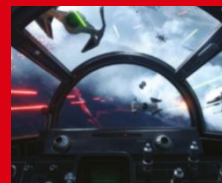
Robots, nano-bees, and Jeff Goldblum - it's Call Of Duty, alright, but not as you know it.

70 Rise Of The Tomb Raider



Get your woolly hat on for a trip to icy Siberia in Lara's latest archaeological adventure.

76 Star Wars Battlefront



It's finally here! But can DICE's grand tribute to Star Wars past really live up to the hype?





Intimidation

You are such a fearsome sight to behold that whenever you aim your gun at a lower-level human opponent, there's a chance that they'll get all frightened and simply throw in the towel right then and there. Unlock additional ranks of this handy perk and you can even coerce your erstwhile enemy into fighting alongside you.

Ghoulish

Radiation is a constant threat in the Commonwealth, draining your max HP and requiring precious RadAway to cure. Unlock this perk, however, and you can experience the little-discussed restorative properties of nuclear waste, as exposure will now heal you. At higher ranks, you can even make friends with packs of feral ghouls.

Nerd rage

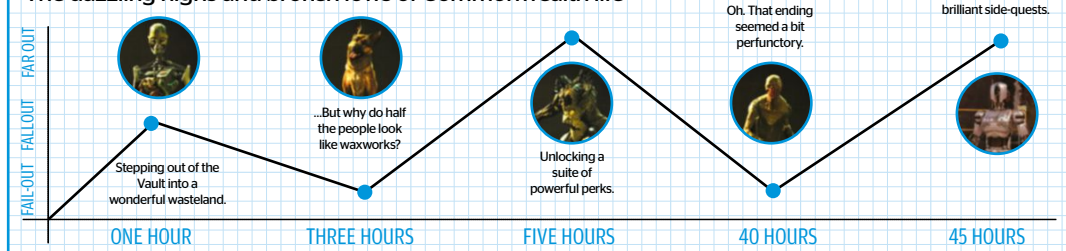
If you're a particularly bright spark you can gain access to this perk, which kicks into effect whenever you drop below 20% health. Your honed boffin reflexes will launch into overdrive, causing time to slow down and providing massive boosts to your damage output and resistance. You'll truly be a poindexter to be reckoned with.

Idiot Savant

If you reside at the other end of the intellectual spectrum, however, this ability might be more your speed. Once unlocked, you'll randomly receive huge boosts to the XP received for completing quests or killing enemies. And the lower your Intelligence stat, the greater the chance you'll get that sweet, sweet bonus - so make sure you stay stupid.

GAME OF GRAPHS

The dazzling highs and broken lows of Commonwealth life



more carefully-sculpted faces in the mix this time around, but the continued presence of these glassy-eyed puppets is nevertheless an unwelcome distraction. "Sure, Desdemona, you lead a fine faction and make a convincing argument for synth rights, but we just can't get over how weird your hair looks, so we're off to join the Brotherhood Of Steel".

Far more problematic than a lifeless bouffant, however, are the game's raft of technical issues. Although we only suffered one hard crash in more than sixty hours with the game, we observed consistently choppy frame-rates, wonky animations, and glitchy physics. On one occasion, we were mowed down by a Vertibird gunner during the earnest conversational conclusion to a companion side-quest. On another, we entered a conversation in which the dialogue audio failed to play at all; the

camera artfully cutting back and forth between two character models staring dumbly at one another for a full minute.

Radioactive duty

Fallout 4 is not a broken game, but it is a glitchy one. In a sense, that's always been the bargain that players willfully enter into in return for a game of this scope: Hundreds of hours of play in an enormous gameworld in exchange for a little understanding when Dogmeat clips into the floor. But recent open-world outings such as The Witcher 3 and Metal Gear Solid V have managed to deliver on the promise of sprawling, systems-led gaming with far fewer of the compromises we've historically been accustomed to making. The bar has been raised, then, and Fallout 4's technical shortcomings are far more noticeable today than they might have been a year

ago - and it's difficult to imagine they can all be rectified by post-release patching.

Fallout 4 disappoints on a technical level, then, but in terms of world-building and tone, Bethesda has delivered another confident triumph. It's a genuinely funny game, and those who stray from the beaten, irradiated track will discover wonderful kernels of ink-black comedy tucked away across the Commonwealth. Fallout 4 is something of a contradiction. It offers refined gameplay alongside inadequate tech; witty writing next to a po-faced main questline; and the thrill of discovery rubbing shoulders with a feeling of systemic familiarity. Ultimately, though, while Fallout 4 may not arouse the sheer sense of excitement and newness that greeted Bethesda's first take on the franchise, it is nevertheless a deftly refined continuation of the concept. ■

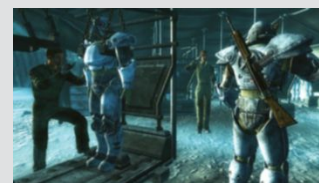
GM LOVES...

- ✓ Post-war Boston makes for a colourful, characterful setting.
- ✓ The writing is as charming, funny, and poignant as ever.
- ✓ A map scattered with superb side-quests and diversions.

GM HATES...

- ✗ It's increasingly hard to overlook the technical shortcomings.

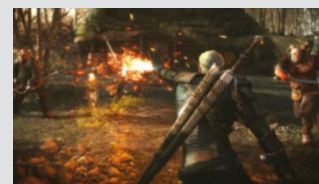
Better than...



Fallout 3

This latest entry improves on its predecessor in myriad ways, even if it can't deliver the open-world awe we experienced back in 2008.

Worse than...



The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

Both RPGs offer vast sandboxes, strong writing, and moral ambiguity, but CD Projekt's masterpiece boasts solid tech to boot. Point Geralt.

2ND OPINION



"The next-gen wasteland that is the Commonwealth is so wonderfully humongous that I feel like a Stimpak in a haystack. It's not quite the step forward I was hoping for, but with so much to sink my teeth into, it'll be ages before I run out of reasons to keep returning to this RPG epic."
Jen Simpkins, Staff Writer, OPM

GM JUDGEMENT

90%



Sometimes beautiful, a bit broken, and really quite brilliant in places, forgiving fans will adore Fallout 4.
James Nouch



Combat relies more on copious button bashing than considered counters. Still, fights are beautifully animated.



Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Publisher** Ubisoft **Developer** Ubisoft Quebec **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE

Say au revoir to broken Paris, and 'allo to glorious London



ould you Adam and Eve it? Ubisoft's historical hitman franchise isn't irreversibly borked this year! After the

farce of last year's Unity launch, the publisher desperately needed to steer things back on track. Well, mission accomplished... mostly. Though key overarching problems persist, this latest entry outshines its predecessor thanks to a spectacular 19th century London, likeable dual leads, and a much improved game engine.

With Unity, Ubisoft didn't so much drop the ball, as it set the ball alight and punt it through the window of a shelter for orphaned kittens. Thankfully, the French publisher seems to have learned from last year's mistakes, as Syndicate ditches unwanted features, and tightens up the underlying tech.

There's no alright-but-not-fantastic, vaguely unnecessary multiplayer to distract from the main campaign. No detestable, constantly malfunctioning companion app. Most importantly, Unity's thousands-strong crowd tech – which caused such horrible frame drops in Arno's adventure – has been jettisoned. The result is a slightly less ambitious, yet vastly more stable version of the series' AnvilNext engine; one that largely holds to a fairly smooth 30fps. Clearly, Ubi has listened to the fanbase.

Capital idea

Syndicate is also given a major leg up thanks to its excellent choice of setting – the game's meticulous interpretation of Victorian era London makes for a scintillating sandbox. Squatting on top of Nelson's Column; scaling the Houses of Parliament as dozens of passing ships clog a perennially choppy Thames; fighting a key villain in a secret chamber

atop St Paul's Cathedral – Ubisoft Quebec do exhilarating justice to the Old Smoke's most iconic landmarks.

This is a bustling melting pot of a city, set in the era of penny dreadfuls, child labour, locomotives, and rampant industrialisation. It's the London of Charles Dickens, Florence Nightingale, and Alexander Graham Bell – all of whom you help out in side missions. It's also the London of Jacob and Evie Frye, Syndicate's twin playable assassins.

Does the addition of swappable lead characters alter the action in any meaningful way? Not really. Still, at least the pair enjoy some banterful, bickering chemistry during cutscenes. Jacob is impulsive, and wants to murder Templars; Evie is level-headed, and would rather search for a piece of Eden – AC's perpetual macguffin. In gameplay terms, this manifests in the former being handier in a fight, while his sister is more adept at stealth. Yet though many story

quests can only be completed with a specific sibling, you're almost never asked to switch between the pair to complete objectives. Seeing as you level the twins up separately through slightly differing skill trees, the absence of mid-mission GTA V style character-swapping feels like a missed opportunity.

At least getting around London is great fun. Enter the new rope launcher. Someone best get Bruce Wayne on the blower, because clearly Jacob and Evie pilfered Syndicate's headline gadget from a 19th century Bat Cave. Acting like an old-timey version of the grapnel gun from the Arkham games, this fantastic gizmo allows you to propel yourself hundreds of feet forward in a flash. The launcher isn't just handy for climbing Big Ben in eight seconds, either. Used cerebrally, it's also a cracking evasion tool that allows you to quickly zip out of enemy sight lines, while its cables provide a useful perch for performing badass aerial assassinations. It's a truly excellent addition, and one that reinvigorates traversal.

Horse code

Next up: Grand Theft Horsey. Yes, it's time to talk Syndicate's rather spiffing carriages. Outside of AC IV: Black Flag's wonderful Jackdaw ship, the variety of filly-pulled carts you can commandeer here are the finest vehicles to grace the series. Not only are they a massive time-saver, but carts are a real pleasure to drive, thanks to some beautifully animated horses. Certain missions even force the twins into carriage-on-carriage showdowns, as the game challenges you to take out rival drivers in heated and chaotic chase sequences.

"THE GAME'S METICULOUS TAKE ON 19TH CENTURY LONDON MAKES FOR A SCINTILLATING SANDBOX"

But while getting between mission markers has had a radical and entirely welcome overhaul thanks to those oh-so-sexy ropes and cracking carts, stealth mechanics have stood woefully still. Placed next to Metal Gear Solid V and its wonderfully versatile control scheme, Syndicate's archaic sneaking feels downright suffocating. Clumsy parkour controls in tight spaces make it hard to manoeuvre with precision, often leading to moments where you get spotted because you couldn't vault over a gate properly. Lara gets soft cover right in Tomb Raider, but we wish we had a button to attach to it properly here.

That said, Syndicate's biggest assassinations are partially salvaged by taking several pages out of another stealth icon's book: namely, Hitman. Inspired by 47's multilayered, murderous parlour games, the game's act-closing missions give you scope to kill targets in uniquely imaginative ways. Be it colluding with a disgruntled Tower Of

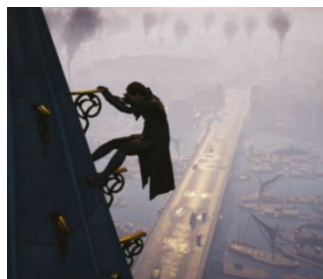
TOURIST TRAP

Taking in London's loveliest, oh-so-scalable landmarks

While stabbing baddies with hidden blades is swell, the biggest joy of being dropped into 1868's London is checking out the sights. Syndicate does an amazing job of rendering the city's most enduring architecture – here are the top tourist spots you have to visit...



2 While at Trafalgar Square it's impossible to resist clambering up on to Nelson's rusty head.



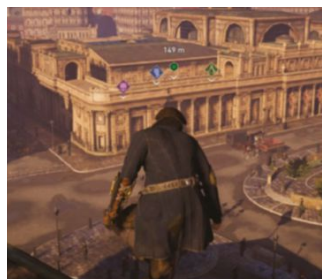
4 The Thames is treated as a district in its own right, and jumping from boat to boat is brilliant fun.



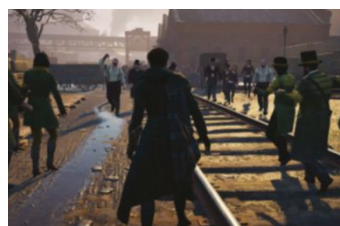
1 What better way to appreciate iconic clock tower Big Ben than by clambering up and getting face-to-face?



3 St Paul's Cathedral hosts a scrap between Evie and a nasty Templar. You could call it an apostle jostle...



5 The Bank of England sets the scene for one of Jacob's more daring hits. No cash withdrawals today, folks.



GANG WARFARE

Party up with a posse

As you battle the dastardly Blighters gang throughout London's different districts, you're given the chance to build your own club of cheeky thugs by spending your hard-earned pounds. A bit of cash spent will make your Rooks much better fighters – useful when waging war for control of a borough in massive street fights. Recruited gang members can also be used to distract (read: punch and kick) police and guards.

London guard in a fake arrest that takes Evie within neck-slitting distance of her prey, or Jacob pretending to be a dead body so he can be wheeled to an evil surgeon on a gurney, Syndicate's hits have a thoughtful, winning sense of theatre about them.

When you're not pretending to be a cadaver, you'll likely be ticking off a variety of fairly diverting side missions. As you liberate kids from gruelling factory work, kidnap criminals to claim bounties, and introduce Templars to the business end of a sword cane, you'll slowly claim the map's six major boroughs in the name of the Fries and their gang, the Rooks. Sure, these quests can feel like busywork, but as open-world side content goes, they're confidently designed.

That's the key difference for Assassin's Creed this year: confidence. From the stable engine to the impeccable setting, Syndicate is an assured response to its bungled Parisian predecessor. It doesn't mean the series couldn't still do with a year off, of course. Those creaky stealth controls are showing their age these days, while mission templates still cling to nonsense like 'tail the target from A to B' far too often. Yet for the most part, this is a return to form – one that successfully wipes away the stain of Unity's failings. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ London is arguably Ubi's best realised sandbox city.
- ✓ The rope launcher makes hurtling between rooftops a joy.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Stealth feels seriously clumsy next to the competition.
- ✗ Dull mission types, like tailing, make an unwelcome return.

Better than...



Assassin's Creed Unity

Syndicate's engine feels far more solid than in this unfortunate botched effort, and its city is considerably more compelling and well-realised.

Worse than...



Metal Gear Solid V

The newly-crowned king of open-world sandbox stealth will take some topping, thanks to its incredible looks and immaculate sneaking.

2ND OPINION



"Dave's spot on about the stealth sections showing their age. It's not that they aren't fun, it's just that they feel so obviously clunky next to other, more focused sneaky offerings. I was all aboard for Jacob and Evie's tale, though. Their constant bickering is oddly endearing."

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, Editor

GM JUDGEMENT

77%



Beautiful Victorian London restores faith in the series – but the stealth is in serious need of an overhaul.
Dave Meikleham

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Keep an eye on what opponents look like - knowing what Specialist ability you might have to deal with is as important as understanding your own.

The Talon drone is a mid-range killstreak that serves well while online players are learning the ropes - no one ever checks the skies until it's too late.

Many of Black Ops III's maps include tricky swimming sections, perfect for aquatic ambushes or rapid escapes with stolen flags.

Cosmetic upgrades mean you can design layered paint jobs for cherished guns. Expect a hundred million attempts at, er, phallic logos.

Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC, PS3, 360 Publisher Activision Developer Treyarch ETA Out now Players 1-18

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS III

Operation: Cram enough stuff on a Blu-ray to make your console creak

During its World War II phase, *Call Of Duty* helped solidify the idea of the modern shooter campaign, set piece-stuffed shooting galleries set around the plight of common soldiers. With *Modern Warfare*, the series pulled the same trick for multiplayer, delivering the PC-centric twitch shooter to the mass console market with aplomb. Treyarch then went on to make the multiplayer-story hybrid *Zombies* as a sort of joke, never realising that it would become as fundamental to COD as those more traditional game-types. And Activision wept, for there were no more modes to conquer.

Where does a series go when it has, if not perfected, then popularised everything it does? The fact that every recent COD has used these three pillars as a structure implies that none of its many contributing

developers is in a rush to innovate. Black Ops III doesn't buck the trend - but that's not to say it's trying nothing new. Here, Treyarch's work is in packing those modes with more than ever before, experimenting within those now-set boundaries.

Crowd control

Take multiplayer: stuffed with the modes and loadout systems that come with any COD instalment, but augmented with fresh ideas. Alongside weaponry, perks, equipment, and killstreaks, you now choose from a line-up of nine unlockable characters, the Specialists, each of whom brings one of two unique abilities into battle with them (meaning, practically speaking, a total of 18 to choose from).

Abilities range from out-and-out attack - we can see Russian tactical arsonist Firebreak's insta-kill Purifier flamethrower getting nerfed pretty soon - to useful support abilities, such as floor traps and enhanced vision (which is devastating in hardcore no-radar matches). On a slow

timer and activated by hitting two shoulder buttons, it's a fairly transparent shout-out to Activision's newer shooter franchise, *Destiny*. Within a couple of matches, we were already forming tactics for not only which Specialists we liked in which modes, but also how to counter other people's tactics. It adds a new layer of thinking to a game where the meta often doesn't matter once a perfect loadout's been discovered. That may create future balancing issues, but our initial feeling is very positive.

Multiplayer's had some quieter changes, too. Playing matches now rewards you with an in-game currency (don't worry, there are no current plans for microtransactions) called Cryptokeys - these open chests that offer cosmetic upgrades for your equipment, keeping you working to find stuff well after you've earned all the usual unlocks. At the more hardcore end of things, drafting systems for Specialists and ban votes for equipment add to the eSports-friendly hardcore options.

It feels comfortably familiar to play - nabbing *Advanced Warfare*'s double-jumps and parkour, yet dropping lateral thrusters - but the changes add a sheen of freshness to proceedings. It's about helping you have more fun, not offering



GRAVE NEW WORLD

Dead Ops gets an unexpected resurrection

Activision likes to mix up COD's approach to the traditional FPS, but this instalment includes an altogether different type of blaster. *Black Ops* fanatics may remember *Dead Ops Arcade*, a top-down shooter hidden in amongst all the menu folds of that game. *Black Ops III* brings a new edition (pleasingly making it a mode sequel inside a sub-series sequel inside a sequel). *Dead Ops Arcade II* isn't the most polished part of the package, but it's a full campaign worth of twin-stick zombie blasting, with some surprising diversions (get your racing gloves on). But you have to find it first - we'll tell you it's hidden in Campaign mode, but no more than that. Happy hunting.

"JEFF GOLDBLUM AS A MURDEROUS MAGICIAN IS ONE OF OUR FAVOURITE CHARACTERS FOR SOME TIME"



Custom characters in single-player? Named characters in multiplayer? Hellboy and Ian Malcolm in Zombies? Madness.



Shadows Of Evil returns to the arm-chompingly difficult state beloved (sort of) in the original Zombies mode.



Multiplayer's as frenetic as ever, but the injection of Specialist administrators a dose of tactical nous we very much like.

an entirely new kind. Which was likely the mantra for those making the campaign too. Sadly, they had far less success.

The outlook is initially good - telling the story of a nameless soldier (for the first time, you get to select gender and some measure of your appearance) who's mutilated by robots in the now-dystopian universe of the Black Ops timeline, it delves into more heady territory than most CODs have dared to tread. After being rebuilt, Robocop style, you start uncovering a conspiracy that's seemingly using brain implants to turn good soldiers into killing machines for unknown ends. It's dark, even trippy in places, and you can feel the ambition to tell a story about more than simple warfare.

That's matched by new additions to how you play, most notably with Cyber Cores, three tech trees of unlockable abilities that let you manipulate the world (destroying scenery or remote-hacking machinery) or just straight-up murder people. Setting off grenades still attached to utility belts is a particularly nasty solution to enemy overcrowding.

Unfortunately, none of that ambition quite comes off. The storyline is close to a disaster, told badly, with horrible

exposition that can't cover for the whole chunks of narrative simply missing, while the same boss fights play out over and over again. It says a lot that the campaign's new hub base lets you play the missions in any order from the beginning - it doesn't matter, because you don't have a clue what's going on anyway. Cyber Cores end up being slow enough to charge that you'll just experiment with each in turn and ultimately choose a favourite, instead of using them in any way that could be classed as tactical.

Positive shambles

Yet Black Ops III is still hard to totally write off, because there's simply so much here. Drop-in-drop-out co-op adds hugely to the experience (not least because you can blast past crappier moments, quick-smart), and there's a lot more than the eight-hour story to play. Combat Immersion mode is a wave-based shootout, and two hidden extras bulk out the game enormously. It's flawed, but there's no doubting the generosity.

Zombies mode has been similarly beefed up - and, if anything, it's the better storyline on offer. Now taking place in a film noir setting, this is classic fare with a

brilliant, gaudy veneer. The four characters are celebrity-faced antiheroes, each with a dark past (Jeff Goldblum as a murderous magician is one of our favourite game characters for quite some time), placed into a Jazz Age nightmare. This first instalment, Shadows Of Evil, is the biggest map yet created for Zombies mode. In truth, it's a struggle to see it all - not because it's too large, but because it's caustically difficult.

Fail to work as a team, or don't use the power-ups that turn you into an all-seeing tentacle beast able to unlock new areas at the right moments, and you won't make it more than a few waves. It's intricate stuff, with secrets abounding, and speedrunning tactics waiting to be found. But, quite honestly, it's the setting that makes it, with moody jazz wafting through your headphones as you battle the undead while your characters throw dated quips back and forth.

More than anything else, it's Treyarch's devotion to making the game feel expansive and welcoming that makes Black Ops III work. Call Of Duty is known for setting a standard, and this lives up to that heritage. You won't find a more feature-stuffed shooter this year. ■

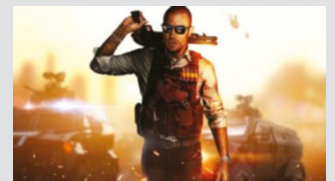
GM LOVES...

- ✓ It's classic COD, augmented. You know, like a robot-person.
- ✓ More value-for-money than almost any other triple-A game.

GM HATES...

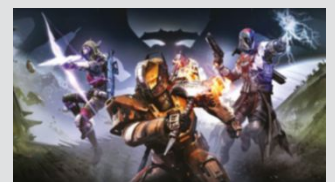
- ✗ Ham-fisted, at times even embarrassing campaign story.
- ✗ Mechanical superpowers should be way more enticing than this.

Better than...



Battlefield: Hardline
COD's biggest nemesis made nowhere near the same forward steps as this. Plus, cyborg soldiers are just better than everyday cops and robbers.

Worse than...



Destiny: The Taken King
The new kid on the block feels like a far more modern attempt at the shooter structure. Cooler guns and all. And via Year Two's strides, it feels new again.

2ND OPINION



"I was all aboard the story train, literally, during the first level, which set up the high sci-fi concepts brilliantly. It quickly became dull, however, thanks to predictable AI and weirdly unsatisfying wider shooting galleries. Where are all the memorable bits from COD of old?"
Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, Editor

GM JUDGEMENT

80%



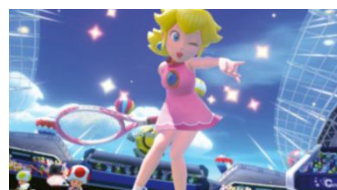
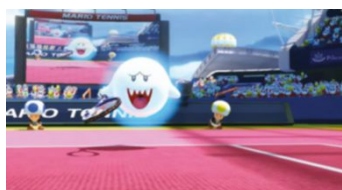
The campaign is a letdown, but Black Ops III offers so much you can ignore it and still have a blast.
Joe Skrebels

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



With Rosalina joining the roster alongside Peach and Daisy, there are more princesses to play as than ever.



Format Wii U Publisher Nintendo Developer Camelot Software Planning ETA Out now Players 1-4

MARIO TENNIS: ULTRA SMASH

A Grand Slam, or a Wimble-don't?

Mario's had a crack at almost every sport going over the years, from golf to dodgeball, from equestrian show jumping to chess-boxing (ok, maybe not that last one), but he's arguably best at one of the first he turned his hand to: tennis. Ever since the N64 classic (which also brought us Waluigi), Camelot has been serving up regular doses of brilliantly playful racket-wrangling - and at its core, this latest entry follows in those footsteps.

The basic gameplay is as strong (and joyously silly) as ever, bringing back the directional aiming and rock-paper-scissors/lob-drop-slice shot system of its predecessors. In fact, in terms of on-court action, very little has changed since 2012's Mario Tennis Open - the control scheme is unchanged, and chance shots still offer powerful moves to those who can position themselves on a temporary glowing circle and pull off the

corresponding shot-type. The new gimmick is the addition of Mega Mushrooms - the New Super Mario Bros power-up acts much the same here as it did there, boosting your character to a ridiculous height for a brief period of time, granting greater range and shot power alongside the increased risk of getting hit by the ball. It's a rather simple addition, and one that doesn't really impact the way you approach matches, but it's enough to freshen things up a little, and is optional for those who don't enjoy it. Also added are jump-shots, which feel like a rather more worthwhile inclusion. A clumsy return gives your opponent a chance to leap up into the air and smash a shot into the turf, making it an utter pain to hit back. It's a mechanic that rewards precise, thought-out play over button mashing.

Mode rage

So, the actual tennis remains as ace as ever, with a few twists spicing things up for veterans, which no doubt leaves those of you who've stolen a cheeky

glance at the final score wondering: what gives? The big problem with Ultra Smash is the same one that initially marred Splatoon earlier this year - there's just not enough of it. Besides Exhibition matches, and a couple of mini-games which amount to little more than a return-the-ball challenge and a see-how-many-tiebreakers-you-can-win contest, there's only online play to keep you entertained. A simple tournament mode would've given the game some structure, but as it is you're left with nothing but ticking off achievements. Fun! Looking at the Wii U's sparse Christmas line-up, you've got to wonder whether Ultra Smash has been rushed out to plug a gap - it certainly feels like it could've been done with a few more months in the development oven.

If you're just here for the multiplayer, however, you shouldn't be disappointed - you'll easily lose hours trying to outwit and outplay your friends in local matches, and while online face-offs don't have quite the same magic, they're still solidly good fun. It's just difficult to feel anything but lukewarm about what is essentially a stripped-down, HD version of its 3DS predecessor - which came with RPG-lite Mii customisation, four great tennis variants, and an eight-cup tournament mode. By comparison, this effort barely makes it over the net. ■

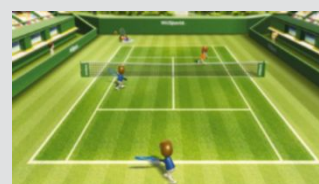
GM LOVES...

- ✓ There's a good selection of courts and characters.
- ✓ The core formula and gameplay are as brilliant as ever...

GM HATES...

- ✗ ...but that makes it feel like it brings little new to the table.
- ✗ There's a real lack of game modes to keep you occupied.

Better than...



Wii Sports Club

Wii Sports Tennis might've been the game that made Nintendo a household name for a new generation of players, but it was a bit too simple in play.

Worse than...



Mario Tennis Open

The 3DS outing of the series is far superior, with its excellent mini-games - including a tennis version of the original Super Mario Bros.

I NEED TO KNOW



Ultra Smash solves a decade-old multiplayer problem: by letting one player play on the GamePad while the other's on the TV, you can both have the camera positioned behind your character as you would in single player.

GM JUDGEMENT

67%



There's a quality game of tennis here - it's a shame there aren't enough game modes to support it.
Alex Jones

"YOU'VE GOT TO WONDER WHETHER ULTRA SMASH HAS BEEN RUSHED OUT TO PLUG A GAP"

Ever noticed Waluigi has a celebrity lookalike? Yes! It's Tom Hardy. (Not really, it's Dick Dastardly, obviously)

GM Review

The Final Verdict!

That little old thing? Just a massive pirate ship suspended hundreds of feet above a freezing cavern. No biggie.



Format PS4, XO (reviewed), PC, 360 Publisher Square Enix Developer Crystal Dynamics ETA Out now Players 1

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

Superb Siberian sequel unearths the spirit of a true legend



There's one thing 2013's Lara reboot got oh-so-right: the raiding of tombs. Its hugely refreshed, Uncharted-aping gunplay and flare for bombastic setpieces were also a hoot - but those seven little challenge tombs really tapped into the sense of adventure which helped make Croft such a icon back in her Eidos days. Good news: those optional caverns are back, bigger, better and in greater numbers. Best break out that pickaxe, there's a lot of awesome archaeology ahead.

That, and a fair bit of shooting feral grizzly bears in the face. Rise Of The Tomb Raider ditches its predecessor's fictional (and super blustery) Japanese island of Yamatai, and instead transports the action to the Siberian wilderness. The party line is Lara has packed her parka

and whisked herself off to the coldest plunderable place on Earth to hunt down the Divine Source - a legendary artefact/magic macguffin that eluded her father for years before eventually driving him to suicide. But the real reason you're in such snowy climes is because Crystal Dynamics needs a dramatic switch of scenery to re-emphasise critter combat.

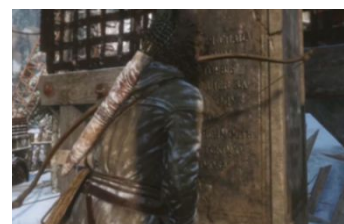
Wild things

Disappointed that Lara could really only put an arrow through the occasional wolf, deer or boar last time out? Fret not: Xbox One's other killer Christmas exclusive - even if it's only timed until 2016's PC and PS4 versions - throws one heck of a Really Wild Show. It's not quite up there with Far Cry 4's 'why is there an eagle pecking my eyes out every 17 seconds' action, but the addition of deadly predators such as lynx, snow leopards, and grizzlies certainly gives Rise's sandbox side activities more teeth.

Like its predecessor, this action-orientated sequel channels open-world elements. Lara's frigid playground is basically one big interconnected hub, where linear corridors designed for showy setpieces join up with little sandboxes. The latter afford Croft the opportunity to take on side missions for the indigenous people of the Geothermal Valley, and usually involve destroying/collecting a certain amount of objects in a specific region. Though they're never overly tricky, these optional objectives spit out nifty weapon upgrades, while also acting as a pleasant palate cleanser from the more linear story elements.

Even more than in 2013, you can feel Crystal Dynamics shoving its kickass trinket hunter into open-world territory. No, this isn't GTA with extra antique collecting - there are too many tow-the-line platforming/puzzling/shooting sections for that. Still, there's no denying the hybrid action continues to carve out a unique space for rebooted Raider in a crowded, 'me too' market. That's most definitely a good thing. Also, one mission tasks you with chucking chickens into a coop. We approve.

Back to those aforementioned challenge tombs, which, by the way, are

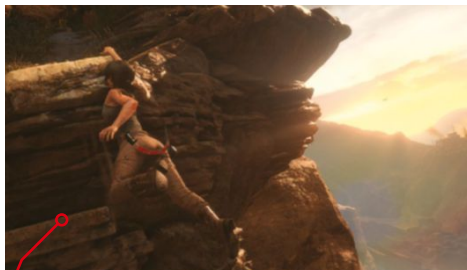


FOUND IN TRANSLATION

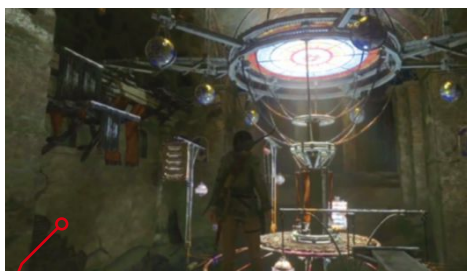
Lara's linguistics

Ms Croft can now master ancient languages as part of her sprawling buffet of side objectives. Finding murals scattered across the environment improves her translation abilities when it comes to deciphering ancient Greek and other tongues. As these skills improve, you're able to make her translate hidden monoliths, which grant a whole heap of extra XP. Collectable Byzantine coins can also be found in sneaky hiding spots, then spent on fancy weapons and alternate outfits, further ensuring there's always something new to discover in this bitingly chilly tundra.

"NEW GADGETS LIKE THE GRAPPLE AXE MAKE LARA FEEL LIKE BATMAN, BUT WITH BETTER HAIR"



The game isn't entirely set in Siberia. A brief intro chapter sees Lara potter about in sunny Syria.



Certain puzzles initially appear to be downright terrifying. Why are there so many moving parts?

fantastic. Not only do they place more focus on subtly evolved, pleasing platform bits, they're gently taxing in a way that almost always gets your grey matter going without ever leaving you baffled or frustrated. Are they Portal difficult? Hell no. But each one offers an imaginative conundrum, often tasking you to closely observe and manipulate the elements or surroundings.

Some highlights: Using the returning rope arrows to yank a boat around an ancient, partially submerged bathhouse. Getting your Donkey Kong Country on with a dash of diverting minicart fun in a colossal underground ravine. Taking advantage of a poisonous gas rupture while turning an entombed corpse into a makeshift battering ram. You don't have to attempt any of these nine optional tombs. But you'll really be missing out on a lot of noodle-scratching fun - not to mention bonus abilities, such as faster rock climbing or deadly lock-on arrows - if you pass up the opportunity.

While you raid your little heart out in some ancient Siberian pit, it's impossible not to be bowled over by how gosh darn pretty everything looks. Crystal Dynamics pushes Xbox One harder than any title outside of Halo 5, and the end

result is a top tier triple-A offering that mostly holds to a steady framerate while looking a million bucks. Alright, probably tens of millions.

The world is savagely pretty. Whether it's the crunchy knee-high snow enveloping our heroine, or a cascading avalanche that puts the ones in SSX to shame, the combination of impressive particle effects and sumptuous lighting helps create an experience which is knockout gorgeous. And Lara herself makes for a beautifully animated protagonist; forever fluid, alive, and fidgety as she rubs her hands for warmth around a base-camp fire, or adjusts her ponytail when emerging from new underwater swimming sections.

Croft may be a dab hand at the forward crawl, but gaming's First Lady is never more at home than when she's flinging herself between sheer rock surfaces. Remember when we said Lara's platforming was pleasing? Scratch that. It's bloody brilliant. Like 'better than Uncharted' brilliant.

New gadgets like the grapple axe (swinging with it to feel like Batman, but with better hair) and climbable broadhead arrows make Croft more dexterous than ever. Crucially, Rise always provides plenty

of player agency, often demanding keen timing - many platform puzzles involve moving parts. Thanks to Xbox One's mega-rumbly Impulse Triggers, every leap, desperate lunge and scraped pickaxe swing feels wonderfully tactile, too.

Lost the plot

Sadly, the key areas where Lara can't go toe-to-toe with Drake remain plotting and pacing. Once again Tomb Raider fails to tell a decent story, with only Camilla Luddington's likably erstwhile performance as Croft emerging with credit from a dull, undercooked tale of magic artefacts and evil military corporations. Rise also lacks the forceful drive of Uncharted, and the main shooty setpieces, while mechanically strong, never sweep you away like Nate at his best.

It'd be cruel to overly focus on this adventure's shortcomings, though. What you have here is one of 2015's better action games - one that thoughtfully courts sandbox sensibilities in a chilling, utterly captivating world. With a renewed focus on puzzling and the delights of exploration, Crystal Dynamics rediscovers what made PS1 Lara so special, and in the process digs up the soul of a gaming great. ■



HOUSE OF CARDS

Why the joker in Lara's pack is... roast chicken

This latest entry may have ditched traditional multiplayer, but that doesn't mean you can't still compete with your pals. Thanks to a new feature called Marketplace, and a chapter replay mode known as Expeditions, you can set high scores through online leaderboards for your friends to attempt to beat, all the while altering the game's difficulty with modifier cards.

These decks can be bought in Marketplace; an in-game store where Lara is able to spend the credits she earns as she goes through the main campaign (and don't worry, you won't need to cough up a dime of actual wonga). It operates a bit like FIFA's Ultimate Team - you buy different tiers of packs, with each one containing modifiers that change the game in subtle, or not-so-subtle, ways. Some cards increase enemy endurance to make combat tougher, while the more bizarre alter the action in entirely superficial, but nonetheless charmingly daft, ways - say, giving Croft the ability to fire flaming chickens from her bow.

You can deploy up to five of these cards when going into replays of missions, which certainly adds some welcome spice to repeat playthroughs. Activating challenges - like finishing a section without dying - also rewards credits when successful. Now see if your mates can beat your high score and time attack on that fiendish Ancient Cistern tomb. Competitive archaeology; the next big trend in gaming?

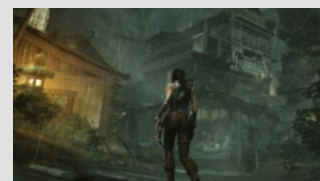
GM LOVES...

- ✓ A renewed focus on winning puzzles and superb platforming.
- ✓ The Siberian setting (and its many bears) makes for icy fun.

GM HATES...

- ✗ A duff plot that fails to push forward the mythology.
- ✗ We wish there'd been more challenge tombs.

Better than...



Tomb Raider

Rise is better at matching the ideals of Croft's (quite rightly) revered PS1 classic, and also offers more satisfying sandbox distractions.

Worse than...



Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection

Among Thieves is still king of the action genre, blending guns, jumps, and setpieces in sublime style.

NEED TO KNOW



Lara's adventure sees her seek out the submerged city of Kitezh. The fabled kingdom was located in central Russia's Nizhny Novgorod Oblast district. We learned something today.

GM JUDGEMENT

89%



Lara's rebooted renaissance continues in this gorgeous action epic - despite a rubbish story.
Dave Meikleham

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



RUNNING MAN

Mira's biomes go the distance

From the forests of Noctilum to Oblivia's Sandy Bum Canyon, Xenoblade Chronicles X plays host to some of this year's best RPG sight-seeing spots.



Format Wii U Publisher Nintendo Developer Monolith Soft, Nintendo SPD ETA 4 December Players 1

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES X

Mira, Mira, in my TV, what's this year's biggest JRPG?



fter romping up and down the legs and shoulders of two colossal gods, few JRPGs have come close to matching

the visual ambition of Wii's Xenoblade Chronicles. Once you've watched the sun set under the looming arches of a vast kneecap, it's hard to imagine getting excited for anything less.

Until, that is, you meet Chronicles X's space whale: a flying luminescent beast that dances in the moonlight beneath a shimmering Aurora Borealis as misty spray from a 200ft waterfall fills the air. Once again Monolith has our full attention. Welcome to Mira, the last human stronghold in the galaxy – and,

more importantly, your new benchmark for virtual sci-fi tourism.

Having fled Earth to save mankind from getting wiped out by warring aliens, you and the rest of the survivors of New Los Angeles must build a home in a vast alien world. The idea of mankind's future lying in the hands of vacuous Hollywood types is faintly terrifying, but not half as burn-tightening as the monsters at the gate: hordes of purple boars and fat, lumbering birds with car-horn beaks, towered over by sky-blotting dinosaurs.

It's a world of astonishing imagination, and it makes the once brawny, majestic limbs of Bionis look like a jumble of emaciated twiglets by comparison. Admittedly, Mira has just six main hubs compared to the double figure arenas of the original Xenoblade – all handily

mapped on the GamePad screen – but what X lacks in numbers, it more than makes up for in sheer size. And rather than gate higher-level beasts off in late-game nooks and crannies, it throws them all in together, making for a more thrilling ecosystem as you weave your way across its plains and valleys.

Art attack

Like its predecessor, aggressive monsters are marked with a telling red eye next to their level icon, giving you time to plan a wide berth before they catch sight of you. Your thundering footsteps can also disturb enemies, drawing out sudden, sharp attacks from underground turtles or arachnids nesting overhead. You quickly learn to make speedy tactical retreats, but engaging Mira's bloodthirsty wildlife is, for the most part, an absolute treat, as X's combat system arguably improves on Monolith's previous Wii scraps – once you get the hang of it. With precious little explanation of what the different coloured Art (attack) icons represent, or how your morale or tension



STRIKE UP THE BAND

Time to make some friends, lone ranger

Despite outward appearances, this isn't just one gigantic single-player experience. You can also team up with up to four other players online, form a party with your friends, or go out adventuring with other choice warriors you've befriended on previous excursions. Servers weren't active before we went to press, but its multiplayer excursions promise to be a huge treat. Squad missions see you tackling dangerous monsters, but Global Nemesis Battles will likely draw the most attention. These special monsters are essentially giant boss fights, offering up rare items to those brave enough to take them down – but if you take too long to defeat one, it will run away.

“ENGAGING MIRA'S BLOODTHIRSTY WILDLIFE IS, FOR THE MOST PART, AN ABSOLUTE TREAT”



point bars come into play, the in-game manual is a critical read.

You'll thank yourself afterwards, as its dynamic battles are a sight to behold. As in Xenoblade, position-sensitive attacks are key when circling or sprinting round enemies, improved here with a location indicator above your row of Art icons. This time, Arts are spread across ranged and close quarters combat, as each of its 16 character classes come equipped with their own combination of blades and rifles. Overcompensating? Not quite, as allowing you to pull back and open up the battlefield is vital considering the varying sizes of Mira's fauna.

The wider scope of attacks feeds into X's new targeting system. Someone clearly smuggled a copy of Monster Hunter onboard New LA, as you can lock on to specific body parts to lop off different appendages, dealing extra damage and earning rare treasure items. The true stroke of genius is how this, in turn, feeds into the new Soul Voice system. These are cries for help that, when answered, magic up a burst of healing - essential as there's no dedicated healer class. Soul Voice triggers occur once set battle conditions are met, from landing critical hits to hacking off limbs. Responding with the correct Art not only keeps your party safe and healthy, but maintains your engagement in even the most low-level

skirmish, transforming fights into a heated dance of call and response as you riff off each other's movesets.

Tall orders

Giant mechs, or Skells, ramp up the action, providing a more level playing field against Mira's larger inhabitants. The designer behind the arduous certification exam missions should be ejected out of the nearest space cannon, but once you've got your licence, the game only gets better. Their power of flight makes the world even more accessible, allowing you to scale peaks and structures which would never have been possible on foot. You have a pretty generous mountain goat-like gravity jump as is, but there's nothing quite like standing on top of a sheer-faced rocky dome and surveying Monolith's mighty craftsmanship.

However, Skells also expose you to new range of threats, as those space whales that ignored your puny human party before take new interest in your newfound metal plaything, so you need to be extra careful you don't accidentally wind up tangling with the wrong set of creatures - especially when maintaining Skells comes at such a huge cost. They shatter more easily than the plastic Gundam models that so clearly inspire them, and new weapons and frames are eye-wateringly expensive. For such a geographically generous world, Mira can

be surprisingly quick to punish those expecting gentle sightseeing larks.

Throughout X, there's a distinct lack of welcoming charm, particularly compared to its predecessor. Instead of an plucky hero, you're a no-name face in a large, soulless military with a supporting cast that isn't nearly as well-drawn as its Wii ancestors. It buries Xenoblade's effortless blend of quests, exploration and combat under heaps of acronyms and division names, creating an overwhelming glut of information that more often confuses than clarifies. Even worse, the wonder of discovery is bogged down by the tedious chore of planting data probes to expand your map, preventing you from starting new story chapters simply because you haven't ticked enough survey boxes.

This kind of bureaucratic nonsense has no place in the world of Xenoblade, and is about as incongruous as the comedy foghorn blasts that burst out of Mira's honking musical birds. For all its flaws, though, there's no denying which world we'd rather be stomping around in. Mira's beauty takes your breath away with every new horizon, and the breadth and depth of each biome only makes it that much more satisfying to discover (even if its life-size mountains demand a degree in orienteering to navigate). It may lack the heart of Wii's JRPG stunner, but the rest of X's anatomy stands shoulder-to-shoulder with giants. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ The vast open world is a real treat to explore.
- ✓ Combat remains varied and lively throughout.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Planting endless data probes is an unnecessary chore.
- ✗ Eight exam missions stand between you and your Skell.

Better than...



Final Fantasy XIII

It's a close call on who has the least inspiring set of heroes, but at least X doesn't place you in one big long corridor for 35 hours.

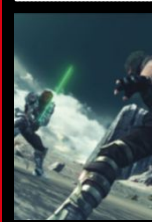
Worse than...



Xenoblade Chronicles

The original and best. For all X's excellence, the crew of New Los Angeles can't hold a candle to the mighty cast of Colony 9.

NEED TO KNOW



It's been a painful wait for this epic JRPG - its original launch in Japan was over seven months ago now. It's understandable, though - a game this huge must take a lot of localising.

GM JUDGEMENT

89%



Lacks the pace and charm of its predecessor, but this awe-inspiring world begs to be explored.
Katharine Byrne

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Format 3DS Publisher Nintendo Developer AlphaDream ETA Out now Players 1

MARIO & LUIGI: PAPER JAM BROS

Enter the Mario fold and crease up with laughter



Videogames love to humanise their heroes. Lara Croft sheds a tear for a murdered deer. Batman ponders if dressing as a flying mammal is a sensible career move. Even Master Chief expresses grief, albeit through the medium of explosions. Mario & Luigi RPGs are Nintendo's own attempt at self-reflection, a series that has tackled Bowser's motivations, Luigi's cowardice, and now, in Paper Jam Bros, places the entire Mushroom Kingdom on the therapist's couch.

The hook, that Mario & Luigi's world collides with Paper Mario's, is an excuse for characters to meet themselves and for the writers to have huge fun. As two Bowser Jrs talk each other out of their father's shadow, two Bowsers show an embarrassing lack of ambition in kidnapping two princesses. The Peach scenes are surprisingly right-on, as the duo gripe about being reduced to kidnap

fodder and the lack of imagination in their wardrobe. Feminist ponderings in a Mario game? Radical stuff.

Which is cool, as the game around them is rather less out there than previous M&L RPGs. It dumps the dual-world gimmick of the past two games and focuses in on the series' core turn-based combat. On the heroes' side, Paper Mario joins the fray, a feeble fighter until he duplicates himself to multiply his attacks. Keeping him fed with clones adds an extra plate to spin, and his attacks require quick finger-work to pull off.

Flat packed

Every move can be amplified, and enemy attack nullified, by nailing a timed button press. These range from swinging a hammer at the apex of its wind up for extra damage, to bounding over Bullies so they charge into their own bombs. This system keeps you engaged in the simplest scuffles, and turns fights into a puzzling dance. Reading tells and picking the perfect time to deflect damage captures Punch-Out's magic in RPG form.

As such, Mario & Luigi games live and die on the variety of their enemy routines, and it's here that the flesh/paper mash-up comes into its own. As well as coming in stacks that have to be whittled down, paper minions behave differently to their fatter forms, giving you two movesets to remember and manipulate. To even things out, Paper Mario can be pulled into a trio attack, a more complicated mid-battle minigame – a violent game of squash, or explosive kite flying – with huge damage potential.

None of this rewrites the rulebook, but it stops combat growing too predictable. Just as you've mastered an enemy type, you meet a new formation, find a new attack, or chance upon a boss. The latter bring steep difficulty spikes, softened with a new battle-card system that awards buffs for pulling off more stylish attacks. It's a welcome nipper adventure outside of battle, too, cutting some of the chat and focusing the action around platforming, puzzling, and madcap Toad-collecting minigames.

The resulting quest is leaner than Dream Team Bros, but doesn't feel quite as epic for it – the new papercraft battles certainly lack the oomph of the giant Bowser/Luigi fights of old. But whether you're getting inside character's heads, or simply bashing them with mallets, Paper Jam Bros remains an enjoyable romp. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ Countering seemingly unstoppable attacks is a blast.
- ✓ New takes on classic themes make for a great soundtrack.

GM HATES...

- ✗ The new papercraft battles are a little unfocused and fiddly.
- ✗ It lacks the clear hooks of previous series entries.

Better than...



Paper Mario: Sticker Star

Monty Python-esque attacks dazzled, but forcing Mario to collect every attack in sticker form was madness.

Worse than...



Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story

Mario does Innerspace, battling bacteria in Bowser's kidneys while the rogue ruins the Mushroom Kingdom.

I NEED TO KNOW



This simply wouldn't be a modern Nintendo game without amiibo crudely crowbarred into the action. Here, the toys transform into battle cards, deployed in fights for a quick advantage.

GM JUDGEMENT

80%

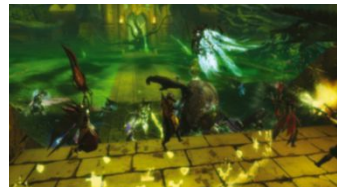
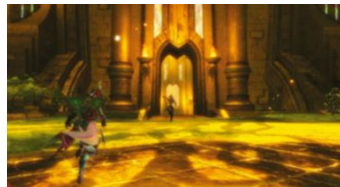


Another gleefully entertaining RPG adventure for gaming's favourite brotherly pair.
Matthew Castle

“TWO PEACHES GRIPE ABOUT BEING KIDNAP FODDER. FEMINISM IN A MARIO GAME? RADICAL STUFF”



There are no world bosses in the expansion. Instead, Legendary-tier monsters can be fought in event chains.



Format PC Publisher ArenaNet/NCSoft Developer ArenaNet ETA Out now Players MMO

GUILD WARS 2: HEART OF THORNS

ArenaNet's masterful MMO welcomes you to the jungle

It's been three years since the release of the base game. In that time, its players have killed a hell of a lot of dragons - or, more accurately, killed a handful of dragons a hell of a lot of times. Now there's a new one in town. His name's Mordremoth, and, given series fans' voracious appetite for dispatching mythical lizards, we can't help but feel he's in trouble. To reach him, you must cut a path through four huge new maps, and some of the toughest battles yet in ArenaNet's MMORPG.

The style of the new maps will be familiar to anyone who's followed the last couple of years of Guild Wars 2 updates. Like Silverwastes or Dry Top, both introduced last year, there are no traditional quests. Rather, each zone contains multiple open-world events that scale in difficulty based on the number of players present. These events build into a map-wide

meta-event - usually multiple boss fights that require everybody on the map to organise and cooperate.

The structure of these events continues to make Guild Wars 2 one of the few MMOs that actively lives up to the massively multiplayer promise. New players are always a welcome sight - even as they increase the difficulty of the spawning enemies - as their presence ensures a better chance of progress and loot. And the enemy design is for the most part strong, even if the abilities of some can be frustrating to deal with. Things can get too intense in the later maps, where there's little room to stop and breathe. We lost count of the number of times we tried to sort our rapidly filling inventory, only to be mauled to death by a roaming pack of tiny raptors.

Roots manoeuvre

The new zones look superb: huge, complex affairs that double-back and over themselves across gnarled roots and branches, and giant cavernous

underground networks. It can be difficult to navigate, but a number of unlockable abilities - called Masteries - help. The best, and easiest to earn, is a hang glider. Hit space as you fall, and you instead soar across the air, to one of the many precarious and hard-to-reach objectives.

Other Masteries let you befriend NPC races, use mushrooms as jump pads, or unlock daily challenges. The system is Heart Of Thorns' main progression track, and you need to earn a truckload of XP to get anywhere. That means repetition or patience - grinding new events, or waiting for the next season of GW2's generous content update cycle to begin.

Heart Of Thorns adds too much to fit onto this page. There's a new profession, the Revenant, who channels ghostly aspects for a variety of strange, distinctive attacks. There are specialisations for each existing profession - our Thief gained an endurance-boosting, evasion-heavy trait line called Daredevil, who thwacks at enemies with a staff. There's a fresh PvP mode, a World vs World map, and new capturable territories for your guild.

More than that, there's a renewed sense of purpose to Guild Wars 2. This is clearly the first expansion of many; a statement that one of the best MMOs currently in operation will be with us for many more years to come. ■

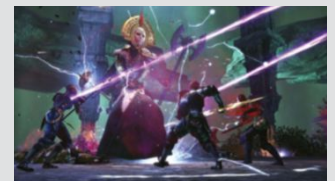
GM LOVES...

- ✓ Huge, beautiful new maps full of interesting things to discover.
- ✓ An event-based structure that encourages group play.
- ✓ New traversal systems that make it a pleasure to explore.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Mastery unlocks have a high XP cost, meaning lots of repetition.

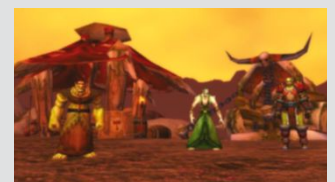
Better than...



The Elder Scrolls Online

It's improved significantly since its patchy launch, but Guild Wars 2 still outclasses The Elder Scrolls Online in almost every respect.

Worse than...



World Of Warcraft

Blizzard's elder statesman is a bit old and creaky these days, but in terms of sheer amount of stuff to do, World Of Warcraft is still king.

2ND OPINION



"This is how you do MMO expansions. Vast and rammed with things fans have called for, there are so many reasons to jump in. It can be a bit unwieldy for newcomers, with all the new systems and activities, but you won't find a more immediately fun MMORPG experience anywhere."
Matt Sakuraoka-Gillman, Editor

GM JUDGEMENT

85%

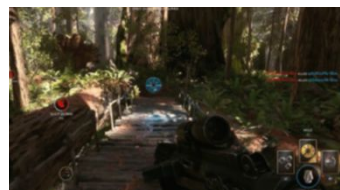
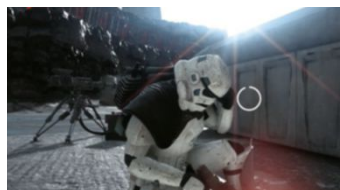


Not the biggest expansion, but it enhances the best parts of an already magnificent MMO.
Phil Savage

"WE TRY TO SORT OUR INVENTORY, ONLY TO BE MAULED TO DEATH BY A ROAMING PACK OF TINY RAPTORS"

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC Publisher EA Developer DICE ETA Out now Players 1-40

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

The Force awakens, but lack of longevity is its phantom menace



First, the really good news: this multiplayer FPS is, without doubt, the most accurate recreation of

George Lucas' legendary sci-fi franchise in videogame form. Playing it is - no exaggeration - like living out countless childhood fantasies.

For the most part, Star Wars Battlefront precisely mirrors the original film trilogy, from the look and feel of key locations such as Endor and Hoth, right down to minute details like the cockpit of an X-Wing or the noise an E-11 blaster makes when you fire it in the direction of some Rebel scum. However, while the movies have a near-endless watchability, even the most perfect depiction of Star Wars can't capture that same enduring appeal. In other words, here's the not-quite-so-good news: Battlefront is pretty shallow

once you look beyond its initial, incredible wow-factor.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, though. Sure, for some, the game's universal accessibility will be a personal insult, as they long for the complexity and depth offered by other shooters. Early, lazy criticisms levelled at Battlefront were that it was simply Battlefield with Stormtroopers. Far from it - this game is completely devoid of the tactical back and forth of DICE's other shooter series, and has all the depth of a puddle of spilt blue milk by comparison.

However, it's not designed to compete with Battlefield, Call Of Duty, Destiny, or any other FPS you care to name. The aim isn't to endlessly tinker with your loadout and learn every map to become a superior player - it's to have a simple kind of fun with fellow Star Wars fans. Accept these limitations (which can be tricky, if you demand 50+ hours of constant, varied entertainment in exchange for

your fifty quid) and Battlefront delivers an absolutely brilliant time.

Battle prod

The game splits loosely into multiplayer and single-player, but realistically, everything can and should be played with friends. You can tread solo (pun intended) into modes like Training Missions, Battles, Hero Battles, and Survival, but they're all available for play with another person and each is the better for it. There's little incentive to play Battlefront on your own, and if that's the experience you crave, then this isn't the game for you. There's about 2-3 hours max to eke out of playing Survival by yourself, and you'll enjoy riding a speeder bike in the Training Mission, but that's it for you, Lando No Mates.

Battlefront is a multiplayer experience, pure and simple. There are nine traditional online modes with the base game, and a shedload more promised via the season pass, and what you get on the

disc/digital download will keep you busy for a while. The highlights are Walker Assault, Fighter Squadron, and Supremacy. Walker Assault is a 20 vs 20 game where Rebels have to stop Imperial AT-ATs from blowing up their base. It's gloriously varied, utterly chaotic, and highly rewarding for those playing as a coordinated team. Fighter Squadron is pure aerial dog-fighting, and the addition of AI pilots means you're constantly blasting enemies out of the sky, ensuring you feel like a true hero. Finally, Supremacy is – and yes, this is a slight contradiction – the Battlefront equivalent of Battlefield's Conquest mode, where you capture and hold points on a map. Again, it's a 40 player mode – this game is at its best in big-team battles.

That's a real comment on not only the size and scope of the game's modes, but the way the actual shooting works. This isn't an FPS where a skilled trigger finger matters too much. There's no aim penalty for running and hip firing: you're just as likely to score a headshot as a player who is stationary and kneeling, looking down their iron sights. It's all about running around, blasting anything that moves, dying and quickly respawning to fight again. Sure, some players are naturally better than others, but even the most ham-fisted combatants can score points. It's very deliberate – this game is accessible to everyone, and takes great pains to avoid shooter elitism.

Naturally, whether that's a good thing or not depends on exactly what you want from the game. The way power-ups work is similarly egalitarian. Sure, you can stack the odds in your favour using Star Cards, which are essentially buffs like

“EVEN THE MOST HAM-FISTED CAN SCORE POINTS – THIS GAME IS ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE”

grenade launchers, sniper rifles, or personal shields, but they're very limited use and not all that varied. More powerful pick-ups are available randomly on each map, but there's no guarantee you'll get something you want – a token could grant you control of Darth Vader, or an X-Wing, but it could equally just be a deployable turret or a single-use grenade. The random nature of these abilities can make games feel frustrating – you may never play as Luke, or pilot an AT-AT – but they restrict greedy players from repeatedly hoovering up the best stuff, and that's a damn good thing for a game that wants to be fun for all.

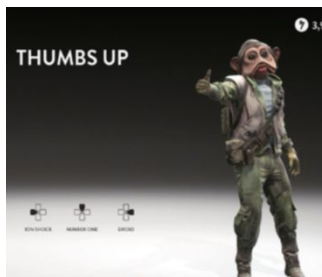
Force choke

So, supremely accessible entertainment within a near-perfect Star Wars experience – best game ever, right? Not quite. The shallow nature of the action does mean that smaller-scale modes, like Drop Zone, Cargo, and Droid Run all fall a little flat. Each of these game types is

EXTENDED UNIVERSE

What else do you get in Star Wars Battlefront?

There's more here than shooting enemies, and smashing your Tie Fighter into canyon walls. These are the goodies you get to mess around with when not in the middle of a shootout session.



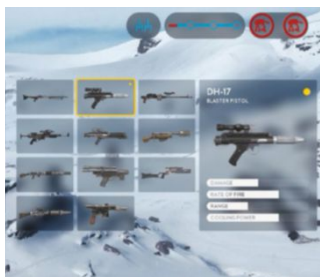
2 There are plenty of emotes to play with too. You can equip three at once, all mapped to the d-pad.



4 Star Cards offer minor buffs, and you can create specific 'hands' (loadouts, then) before each match.



1 Character variants are great. Rebels have different species to unlock, Imperials have different Stormtroopers.



3 The variety of blasters is quite poor. While there are differences in stats, most feel and perform similarly.



5 Achieving milestones unlocks items you can place in a special diorama. Pretty pointless, but it's literally there.



NO-HASSLE HOTH

Online play is one big win

DICE has done a fine job of making it easy to join and stay in a game. Respawn is near-instant, and you never howl in frustration over loadout delays. Will there be server issues early on? Honestly, it seems likely, but the sessions we've played have been mostly lag and glitch free, as was the beta. Online games live or die by the smoothness of their multiplayer offering, and so far Battlefront seems solid.

about capturing something or other, and you're playing against fewer opponents, so the lack of variety and lower opportunity for 'Star Wars moments' makes them feel pedestrian fast. Blast, the simple team deathmatch variant, starts to get equally shallow after a handful of games.

The presentation isn't perfect either. Some of the hero characters are poorly voiced, especially Vader (a huge oversight), and playing as Boba Fett and Leia doesn't feel all that special. Even Luke and Vader's lightsaber-swinging isn't as satisfying or precise as you'd want it to be. Generally speaking, the heroes and villains are, surprisingly, a low point in an otherwise flawlessly authentic Star Wars experience.

There's plenty to love here, and the first time you step into the forest of Endor, blast a Stormtrooper, and watch a speeder bike whizz past, you'll be in cinematic nirvana. Yet if you're looking for complexity and longevity, DICE's insistence on keeping things simple will leave you high and dry within about 10 hours. Maybe less. However long you persist with Star Wars Battlefront, though, there's little doubt that you'll enjoy almost every blaster-firing, Ewok-chasing, thermal-detonator-holding second. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ This is a near-perfect recreation of the Star Wars universe.
- ✓ Large-scale multiplayer modes are wonderfully chaotic fun.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Simple FPS gameplay will fail to satisfy the hardcore.
- ✗ Hero characters are largely anti-climactic additions.

Better than...



The Force Unleashed

Battlefront is a far more authentic experience than this strange spin-off, and even your generic soldier has more personality than Starkiller.

Worse than...



Knights Of The Old Republic

Head thousands of years into Star Wars' past, and you'll find a game with far more substance.

NEED TO KNOW



For £40, the Season Pass gets you 16 maps, four modes, four new characters, and 20 pieces of tech (including Star Cards and weapons). And a new emote. Don't you dare forget that emote!

GM JUDGEMENT

81%



A brilliant Star Wars experience, but with limited life-span and little depth.
Andy Hartup

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, Wii U, PS3, 360, Mobile Publisher Activision Developer Free Style Games ETA Out now Players 1-3

GUITAR HERO LIVE

A rockin' makeover with six appeal

After being missing from the scene for five years, the classic series has returned from surgery like an aging Hollywood star and removed the bandages to reveal a brand new look. Gone are the familiar five buttons, replaced with two rows - three black frets and three white frets. It's a more realistic experience, with the new configuration even allowing for bar chords, though veterans may struggle to adjust.

The game itself is split into two distinct modes. The first is the titular Guitar Hero Live, which casts you as the guitarist in a number of faux bands as you take to the stage and perform at festivals. This is presented through a first-person viewpoint using real video footage, so it actually feels like you're strutting your stuff in front of a genuine crowd. Play well and your fans will cheer you on, but start messing up and you'll receive a harsh

booing as your bandmates give you stick. We genuinely had a flutter of stage fright while playing the larger shows, and it's a great feeling to nail a Strong Finish and send the crowd wild.

The soundtrack, though neatly divided into complementary setlists for each band, feels weak compared to previous titles, with a heavy reliance on recent pop tracks that don't all have a strong guitar element to them. There are some decent rock songs to uncover if you persevere, but strumming along to the likes of Eminem and Skrillex feels like a waste of time. Disappointingly, all of these tracks are also locked out of Quickplay until you perform them during one of the 13 available shows, a concept so outdated that Dara O'Brian was doing standup routines about it back in 2010.

Jukebox hero

Remember when MTV actually played music videos? Well that's the spirit encapsulated by the other game mode, Guitar Hero TV. Here you have several channels streaming tracks in themed

shows, and at any point you can jump in and start playing whatever song is on. It's a great way to discover new music, while you compete online with other players for the top score. Each performance awards Coins you can use to customise your player card and highway. Bizarrely, you can also purchase upgrades that increase the value of each note, your maximum multiplier, and other gameplay effects, throwing off the balance the leaderboards rely on.

However, the main use of Coins is to buy on-demand Plays for any of the 200+ tracks available in GHTV. Although the game is reasonably generous with its currencies, granting more of each when you level up, we couldn't shake our concerns about running out of credit and having to resort to microtransactions to buy more Plays. This put us off replaying the same tracks multiple times to perfect them, which feels necessary when trying to move up the difficulty levels with the new controls. You can buy a Party Pass that unlocks the entire catalogue for 24 hours, but the inability to just purchase your favourite tracks for unlimited play is a serious disappointment.

If you're looking for a fun and innovative drop-in/drop-out experience, then GHTV has you covered. Higher level players, however, may ultimately be frustrated by the new DLC model. ■

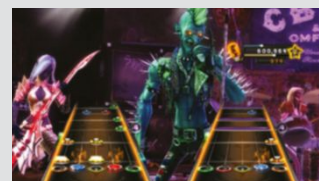
GM LOVES...

- ✓ Nailing a set in front of a huge adoring crowd feels awesome.
- ✓ It's great to hear a track on GHTV and instantly jump into it.

GM HATES...

- ✗ The roster of songs in Live mode feels rather lacking.
- ✗ Dodgy microtransactions mar the game's business model.

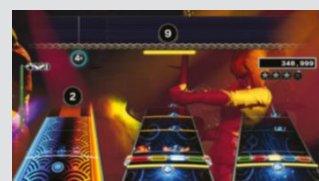
Better than...



Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock

Where Guitar Hero Live feels like a confident move forward, this middling effort was a clumsy stumble back.

Worse than...



Rock Band 4

When it comes to pure rhythm action, this is still the new high bar for the genre - and with far more multiplayer features, it's a better party game too.

2ND OPINION



"An authentic new guitar model and uproarious first-person gigs make this feel like the next step in rhythm action, but a revised pricing model of renting rather than buying songs is a step too far for me. It's a shame, too, that the FMV features are assigned to just 42 tracks." Ben Griffin, Contributing Writer

GM JUDGEMENT

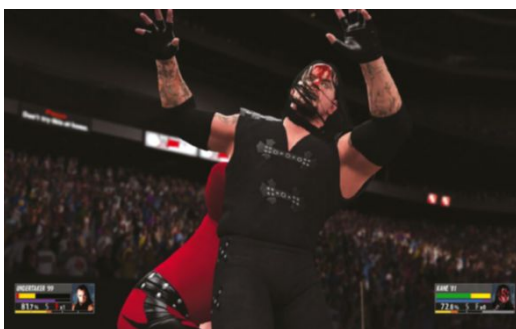
82%



GH Live brings plenty of fresh ideas, but a few annoyances stop it short of achieving true greatness. Iain Wilson

"GHTV MODE IS A GREAT WAY TO DISCOVER NEW MUSIC, WHILE COMPETING WITH OTHERS ONLINE"

What was Iain's longest note streak while playing GHTV? 727. Didn't even break a sweat.



Format PS4, XO (reviewed), PS3, 360 **Publisher** 2K Games **Developer** Yuke's/Visual Concepts **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-6

WWE 2K16

It's not Roman, but it undoubtedly Reigns

At its heart, more than athleticism and physiques and combatants shellacking one another, professional wrestling is about stories. These can be told in the ring – the dastardly villain employing nefarious tactics, the underdog's triumphant turn-around – or, through soap opera storylines and backstage interviews, outside of it. Yet the wrestling genre is littered with games that put all their eggs in the brawling basket: punch, kick, reversal, finisher, repeat to fade. **WWE 2K16** categorically avoids this.

Yuke's and Visual Concepts gets it. Thanks to three ingenious design decisions, every match unfurls a unique narrative. The stamina bar is vital to risk-reward strategies at the end of bouts, where spamming too many moves can render you too tired to hit a finisher. The new limit on reversals – which regenerate, but slowly – creates instances where you

need to let an opponent successfully hit moves in order to keep something in the tank for the match's final throes. And unique traits for every wrestler mean the joy of butchery of yesteryear is no longer a winning tactic – instead, it pays to learn not only your strengths but an opponent's weaknesses. Rumble those elements together, add solid physics and intelligent AI, and the result is genuine drama in every match.

Kane and able

Beyond those core systems, the nuances are also pretty special. Incredibly subtle touches like a fallen grappler shifting into position to receive a top-rope move, stamina-regenerating rest holds, and the ability to break out of any entrance animation to initiate pre-bell shenanigans, all add to those twisting, turning fables. The traditional brawling elements are still here, yet there's meaning to their madness thanks to the brainy stuff which cushions them. Quite simply, this is the closest a game has ever come to mirroring WWE TV.

And, like Eastenders with marginally less violence, the stories are told outside of the ropes too. In MyCareer you build a grappler, then shape his tale in whatever manner you wish: argue with management, spark feuds with other wrestlers, and fumble your way through backstage interviews. In Steve Austin's showcase you relive classic rivalries, and while some feuds are truncated without conclusion, the inter-match videos from each era do a faultless job on your 'one-more-match-before-bed' gland.

Yet Showcase mode's speedy feet also house 2K16's vulnerable Achilles: outside-the-ring stories climax long before you've tired of the in-ring ones. Stone Cold's can be cleared in a weekend. MyCareer is an amiable distraction, but with nearly 130 wrestlers on the disc, you soon yearn to head back into Lesnarland and Ortonville. And you can only do so through a lacklustre Universe Mode, where most of the cutscenes are two years – and a console generation – old.

Granted, the in-ring tales are so bewitching you'll be playing this through WrestleMania in late April anyway. But it does feel like an opportunity missed: a journey that builds brilliantly, only to be KO'd moments before its glorious ending. And as any Dean Ambrose admirer will tell you, that oft-spun yarn is one no wrestling fan enjoys. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ A smart attention to detail and plenty of authentic touches.
- ✓ The vast roster's full of past guilty pleasures. Savio Vega!

GM HATES...

- ✗ MyCareer is prioritised far too much over Universe mode.
- ✗ Where are the Four Horsewomen? Not even as DLC?

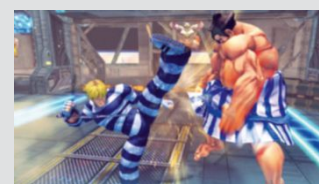
Better than...



WWE No Mercy

Yep, the game many raise up as the genre's greatest ever entry is hammered into a pulp by 2K16's brilliantly realistic slams and suplexes.

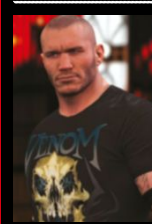
Worse than...



Ultra Street Fighter IV

Ok, so it's in a different genre, sure, but if it's pure one-on-one brawling you're after, Capcom's grand return to form is truly the gold standard.

I NEED TO KNOW



It's criminal that Sasha, Charlotte, and Becky miss out, but on the male side of the roster, 2K has triumphed. From those active now, only two wrestlers are absent – and one's coming as DLC.

GM JUDGEMENT

81%



The series' all-time high point inside the ring – but still a year away from being the complete package.
Ben Wilson

“QUITE SIMPLY, THIS IS THE CLOSEST A GAME HAS EVER COME TO MIRRORING WWE TV”

GM Review

The Final Verdict!

NOW PLAYING



This month's biggest time sinks on Team GM



1 GUILD WARS 2: HEART OF THORNS PC

If you know me at all, you'll know that it was pretty much a given that I'd be planting my tendrils into this. Legendary weapon: here I come.

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, Editor

2 DESTINY: THE TAKEN KING PS4

Yep, I've finally caught the bug. I even got through a bit of the raid! Though everyone did have to wait hours for me to do that platforming section...

Robin Valentine, Production Editor



3 ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE XO

I've not played an Assassin's game since ACII, and I'm hooked! The environmental realism and intriguing side-quests are superb, despite the iffy combat.

Sam Freeman, Art Editor

4 THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT PS4

After its sweeping victory in our awards, I had to leap back in. Shaved Gerald's beard. Instantly regretted it.

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, Editor



5 DIVINITY: ORIGINAL SIN PS4

The Enhanced Edition has been the perfect excuse to play through this inspired RPG again, merrily setting every skeleton in sight ablaze as I go.

Robin Valentine, Production Editor

6 ALIEN: ISOLATION XO

With new film instalment Alien: Paradise Lost in the pipeline, I've been sucked back into this perfect blend of tension, atmosphere and storytelling.

Sam Freeman, Art Editor



OFFICE LUNCHTIME GAME OF THE MONTH:

TOWERFALL ASCENSION PS4

This month, one of last year's GM award contenders stepped up to the plate. We may need to soundproof our game room.



To be honest, a little brain-bleed wouldn't put us off reversing time to pull pranks.

Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PS3, 360, PC Publisher Square Enix Developer Dontnod ETA Out now Players 1

LIFE IS STRANGE: POLARISED

The final stop on the road to greatness



The first episode of this supernatural adventure was a bit of a duffer, a hodge-podge of YA drama, superhero origin story, and apocalypse warning, tied together by awkward references and American teen dialogue as imagined by middle-aged Frenchmen.

This final entry is a psychological, supernatural thriller that takes in

tragedy, crime, even a surreal sequence that harks back to P.T. In the course of five instalments, Life Is Strange didn't just turn a corner - it became one of the best games of the year.

It did that by unflinchingly covering subjects most developers are scared to touch - female friendship, bullying, adolescence becoming adulthood. Mechanically, it's a Telltale game - a pastel-shaded visual novel with puzzles thrown in - but Max's journey, returning to her childhood home for college and

finding a town quietly rotting beneath its picture-postcard veneer, is nothing like that studio's often melodramatic work.

That's never clearer than in episode five, which begins with Max forced into the series' most unpleasant scene yet, a culmination of the uncomfortably personal horror she's been uncovering throughout the game. But instead of physical escape, we see her flee inside herself, overusing her burgeoning time manipulation until it leads her down a rabbit hole of self-reflection that takes and reuses elements from every past episode. It's bold, weird, and a truly unexpected turn for the series.

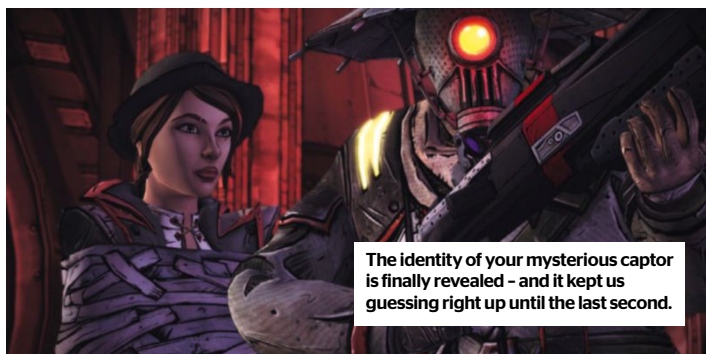
The very final scenes (which we found satisfying, if a bit predictable), have had a mixed reaction to say the least - but there's no doubting Dontnod's bravery. This episode, and the series as a whole, is confident, strident, beautiful and *different*. The biggest praise we can reserve for it is that, by episode five, we understood why episode one had to be the way it is - reinvention is built into the storyline. Life Is Strange turned a corner, and we're hoping it triggers a broadening of videogame storytelling at large.

Joe Skrebels

91%



This picture of photos turns up as a photo in the game. It's pretty meta, you guys.



The identity of your mysterious captor is finally revealed – and it kept us guessing right up until the last second.

Format PS4, XO, PC (reviewed), PS3, 360, Mobile **Publisher** Telltale Games
Dev Telltale Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

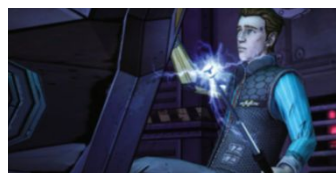
TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS: THE VAULT OF THE TRAVELLER



Opening up Pandora's box

When Telltale first announced its collaboration with Gearbox, we were sceptical – it was hard to see how the mash-up could possibly work. We couldn't have been proved more wrong. With this final entry, the studio caps off its most confident, witty, and exciting work yet.

Episode five is a perfect encapsulation of everything it's done right so far, seamlessly blending humour, action, emotional beats, and a startlingly cinematic sensibility. At the same time, it manages to pack in some genuinely surprising twists and turns, and a more truly climactic end to the season's laser-focused narrative than the studio has ever managed in one of its games



before. And a final battle that really has to be seen to be believed...

It is, of course, almost impossible at this late stage to talk specifics without spoilers, but suffice to say old friends return, the season's villains are explosively confronted, and that coveted vault is finally opened – though perhaps not for the reasons you'd expect. The many plot threads still dangling after episode four are effortlessly resolved, with the substantial three hour run time giving each plenty of time to breathe.

As ever, the choices you've made up to now don't really have much impact on your final destination, but you could hardly ask for a more satisfying end to this incredible journey regardless. Who needs vaults? The greatest treasure on Pandora is right here. ■

Robin Valentine

91%

HOT DOWNLOADS

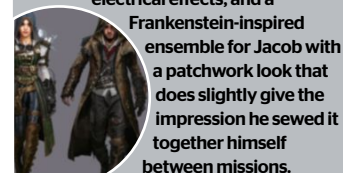
The latest DLC and expansions explored



Start your engines – **Rocket League's** had a set of free updates adding a range of twists to the already energetic formula. Amongst these 'mutators' are changes to ball bounciness and size, the arena's gravity, and more. There's also an option called Time Warp, though it unfortunately doesn't cause all of the cars to blast out tunes from the Rocky Horror Show. Most excitingly, you can also turn the arena icy and the ball into a puck, for **Rocket League's** take on ice hockey.

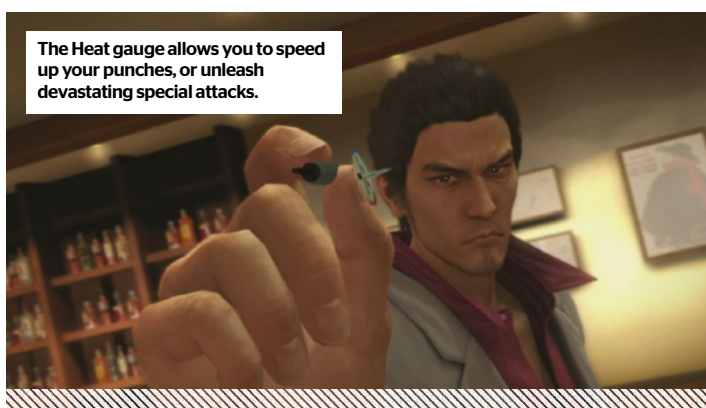
For a rather warmer gaming session, why not head into the deserts and jungles of Azeroth in **Heartstone's** latest solo adventure, **League Of Explorers**? As in previous expansions, each 'wing' offers a rule-bending boss fight and unlockable cards you can slot into your multiplayer decks.

For those more interested in walking bustling city streets than hiking through untamed wilderness, **Assassin's Creed Syndicate** has two snazzy free outfits for its murder-y protagonists. There's a steampunk suit for Evie, complete with crackling electrical effects, and a



Frankenstein-inspired ensemble for Jacob with a patchwork look that does slightly give the impression he sewed it together himself between missions. We can only assume he's trying out for a place in **Minecraft: Story Mode's** gang of creative crafters. In defiance of its usually glacial release schedule, Telltale has already unleashed episode two, **Assembly Required**, mere weeks after the series' debut – and we wouldn't be surprised if, by the time you're reading this, third entry **The Last Place You Look** is out too.

Last, but most definitely not least, players of **Star Wars Battlefront** have yet another excuse to get excited about the return of the epic movie franchise with **Battle Of Jakku**, a new map pack that portrays battles bridging the gap between the original trilogy and **The Force Awakens**. Remember that war-scarred desert planet from the trailer, complete with crashed **Star Destroyer**? You'll be witnessing first-hand the chaos that left it in such a state. Keep an eye out – we wouldn't be surprised if there's some cheeky lore tidbits hidden out there on the battlefield.



The Heat gauge allows you to speed up your punches, or unleash devastating special attacks.

Format PS3 **Publisher** Sega **Developer** Sega **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

YAKUZA 5

This gangsters' paradise was worth the wait

Before its Japanese release in late 2012, **Toshihiro Nagoshi** described this latest entry as a "new house": three years on, the structure may be a little creaky around the edges, but its foundations remain surprisingly solid.

This residence is incredibly spacious, too, containing authentically detailed (albeit fictional) districts from five Japanese cities, each stuffed with an impressively

varied array of activities. Suffice to say you'll be shooting bears in the snow during one chapter, and glad-handing fans as a young pop idol the next.

More frequently, however, it's about punishing fools with the temerity to interrupt your leisure time exploration. Five cities means five playable characters, each with their own fighting style: newcomer Shinada uses baseball-themed attacks, while the formerly sluggish Saejima is nipper than ever. Kazuma's protégé Haruka,

meanwhile, takes on her peers in rhythm-based dance-offs.

The plot, as ever, revolves around the machinations of the underworld's biggest gangs, with bluffs, betrayals, and surprises aplenty. But there are some genuinely moving moments, too, many involving lead Kazuma's attempts to start a new, crime-free life. It's a cliché, sure, but we do feel his pain, even as he breaks his vow to Haruka in spectacular fashion, sidestepping rocket blasts on his way to single-handedly dismantling an army of sword-wielding suits. As sublime as it is ridiculous, **Yakuza 5** is huge, varied, and endlessly fascinating. If you can tolerate its rough edges, this'll keep your PS3 in business well into 2016. ■

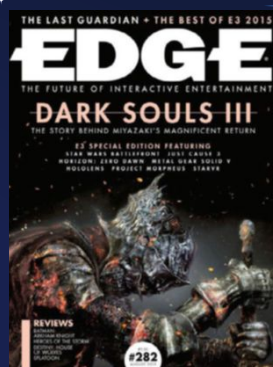
Chris Schilling

85%

SAVE UP TO 57%



GIVE A GIFT
THAT LASTS ALL YEAR



TREAT YOURSELF
OR SOMEONE ELSE

SUBSCRIBE TODAY
FROM JUST **£27**

A magazine subscription is a perfect Christmas gift...



- Choose from a **huge range of titles**
- **Save up to 57% off the cover price**
- Subscribe from **just £27**
- **Free personalised gift card** when buying for someone else
- **Guaranteed delivery** in time for Christmas!
- **PLUS** a range of **stocking fillers** from just £5

2 EASY WAYS TO ORDER



Visit **myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/Z604**



Or call us on **0844 848 2852**

Lines are open Monday to Friday 8am to 7pm and Saturday 10am to 2pm (GMT). Please quote **Z604** when ordering by phone.

Future myfavouritemagazines
Official Magazine Subscription Store

Savings compared to buying 13 full priced issues from UK newsstand. This offer is for new UK print subscribers (paying by Direct Debit) only. You will receive 13 issues in a year. Full details of the Direct Debit guarantee are available upon request. If you are dissatisfied in any way you can write to us to cancel your subscription at any time and we will refund you for all unmailed issues. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. For full terms and conditions please visit: myfavm.ag/magterms. Offer ends: 31st January 2016.

GM
Comp
Win This!

Fallout 4



Finally, a console tough enough to survive a nuclear apocalypse.



© 2015 Bethesda Softworks LLC, a ZeniMax Media company

PIP-BOXING CLEVER

Go off-piste with a custom Fallout 4 XO... and a snowboard!

Here at Team GM, we know what you want. You want atomic-hot, nuclear winter-cool, super limited edition prizes. Prizes like this money-can't-buy Fallout-themed Xbox One. Also a snowboard. Of course.

And hey, why not a copy of Fallout 4 to play on it, too? Er, on the console that is, not the snowboard. The snowboard doesn't have a disc drive.

The 'Pip-Box', as it's brilliantly dubbed, is a lean, green, radioactive machine (don't worry, your chances of irreversible

mutation are less than 38% per session) and comes with a snazzy custom controller straight out of some hypothetical videogame-obsessed vault. Win this awesome console and you'll have the perfect excuse to lock yourself deep underground and settle in for a hundred hours of Fallout 4. Don't worry about getting the time off work - just show it to your boss and he's bound to give you as much paid holiday as you need. Probably.

And what better way to follow-up your marathon trip through the Commonwealth wasteland than getting out on the slopes and shredding some serious gnar, bro, on an authentic Fallout 4 snowboard? The durable fibreglass body

has the "perfect balance of freeride vibration absorption and freestyle liveliness". But, er, we're not going to judge you if you just stick it up on the wall to impress your mates.

For a chance to win these incredible prizes, just wrap your mind around the following question by 5 January 2016 and submit your answer online:

Q Which of these animals can be a companion in Fallout 4?

- A.** Dog
- B.** Manatee
- C.** Baby orangutan



HOW TO ENTER

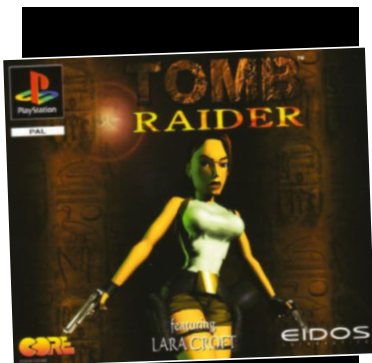
ONLINE

Head to www.futurecomps.co.uk/gmfallout4 to enter the competition, where you can fill in your details and submit your answer.

Terms and conditions: By entering this competition you are agreeing to receive details of future offers from Future Publishing Ltd. The closing date is 5 January 2016. By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules, which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futurepub.com/competition-rules. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via an agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

RetroMaster

We ♥ Old Games!



5 REASONS to REPLAY

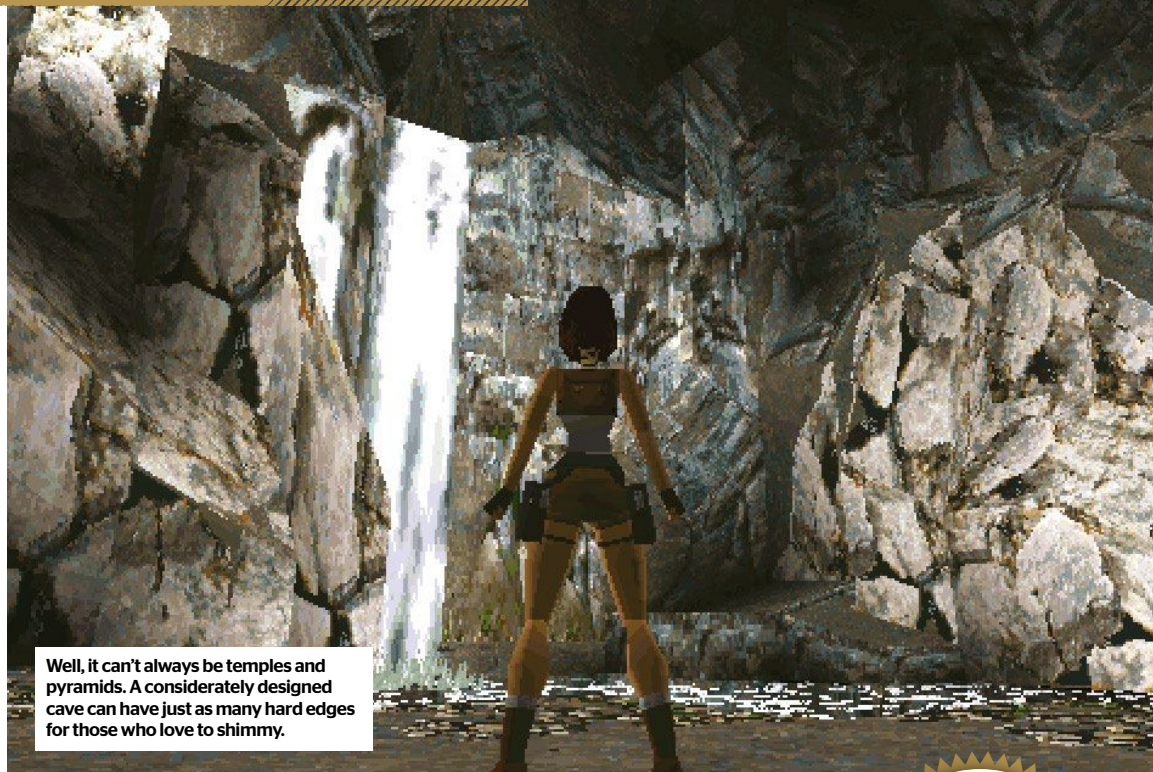
1 Enjoy one of the purest games in the series, before exhaustion left later PlayStation 1 entries languishing as Raiders of the lost spark.

2 No hint of stuff being cut to hit a deadline, with 15 sprawling levels taking in four ancient worlds. Plus a bit of chill time at Lara's cosy flat (i.e. massive mansion).

3 Revel in unprecedented freedom of movement. Run, roll, flip, shove, ledge grab, swan dive, shimmy, and do handstands. Handstands!

4 Medipacks, weapons, and ammo stashed off the beaten track to keep you alert and locked into acrobatic explorer mode.

5 That moment with the T-Rex lurching around a corner in Peru's Lost Valley. So memorable that it's now illegal to discuss Tomb Raider without mentioning it.



Well, it can't always be temples and pyramids. A considerably designed cave can have just as many hard edges for those who love to shimmy.

TOMB RAIDER

Better than Fridge Raiders *and* Space Raiders



Britain, 1996. Charisma vacuum John Major was Prime Minister. The papers were full of Mad Cow Disease and Charles and Di's divorce. Doctor Who returned as a wonky TV movie, and the Spice Girls released their first single. Dark times all round, then. But amidst this cultural depression, a spark of promise: at Core Design, over in the oasis of hedonism we all know as Derby, Tomb Raider was being born.

The origins

It was a big year for polygonal 3D escapades, slowly hauling themselves out of the shadow of our traditional 2D fun times. Strange bedfellows Super Mario 64 and Resident Evil were at the forefront, with Tekken 2 and Virtua Fighter 3 out there evolving and improving. But none of those had Lara.

Our leading lady had an uncertain start, sharing the lead role in Core's temples-and-tombs pet project before her male co-star was axed to halve the workload. Even then, she took a while to find her feet in the practical designer

Developer Core Design
Publisher Eidos
Released 1996
Format PC, PS1, Saturn
Get it PlayStation Store, GOG.com, Steam

boots of a posh English adventuress. Would savvy South American fortune seeker Laura Cruz have had the same impact? Hard to say – but then, this section isn't called 'GM Ponders Alternate Gaming Histories', now is it?

What's most surprising is that the future smash hit was pitched to publishers many times before it finally got picked up. Which, to be fair, was less to do with Lara and more to do with 3D games at the time still being seen as something that required a blood oath with Lucifer to pull off properly...

The legend

In time, Lara and the PlayStation went hand in hand, but it was the Sega Saturn

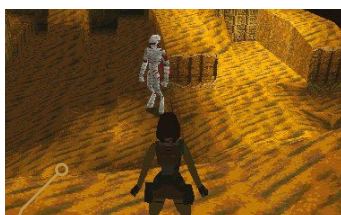
that got the original game first. And as with any classic Tomb Raider, this one merged the pleasures of athletic globetrotting with double-fisted gunplay and a healthy sense of the fantastic. Lara's odyssey from the mountainous heights of Peru to the implausible corridors of Atlantis was festooned with tricks and traps, wolves and crocodiles – and, as if the designers thought you might somehow be yawning after all that, mummies, mutants, and dinosaurs too.

Then there was the Scion, first of many series macguffins broken into far-flung bits, sought out by rotters to invoke some grumpy old god. If this quest involved a lot of time on our part lining up finickity leaps or praying for the next achingly distant save crystal, well, that was why sequels were invented. At the time, a spot in Lara's original archaeological expedition was an experience like nothing else. It had to be: Core knew that

“A SPOT IN LARA'S ORIGINAL RAIDING PARTY WAS AN EXPERIENCE LIKE NOTHING ELSE”



Lara was aghast. Ancient Egyptians had foretold the coming of JLS.



The mummy was just chilling, so Lara didn't shoot it to bits. Except she did.

if the games themselves were dead weight, not even the strongest character could carry off a long-running series.

The legacy

Sadly Lara Croft was rubbish and never heard from again. Oh wait, no: even by the end of 1996 she was everywhere, and before long we had no end of sequels, expansions, films, books, comics, TV ads, real-life models, mainstream press coverage, and best of all, complete validation of Core's push for fearless deeds with a female lead.

She even survived the near-calamity of her PS2 debut in *The Angel Of Darkness*, though it meant relocating to California as publisher Eidos confiscated the *Tomb Raider* IP and shipped it offshore to Crystal Dynamics. Now Croft's antics continue in fine survivalist style, relieved of the annual release pressure that almost nobbled the series like a spike through the neck in a murderous labyrinth in the arse end of nowhere. But raise a glass to Derby's Croft originals, who hooked us up with Lara in that very first epoch-making adventure. A bracing Peruvian red seems appropriate. Cheers! ■

Studio Spotlight

Signals broadcast from the Core



1 Rick Dangerous

(PC, Amiga, Atari ST, C64, CPC, Spectrum - 1989)

If you thought Lara's escapades borrowed a wee bit brazenly from Mr Jones, her fedora-wearing predecessor tackled temples, boulders, Nazis... and legendarily harsh flip-screen platform action. To be fair, contrasting comical Biffa Bacon sprites and a gauntlet of murderous memorisation did give the game its own identity, remembered with fondness and shuddering masochism alike.



2 Chuck Rock

(PC, CD32, Mega-CD, SNES, Game Gear, Mega Drive, Game Boy, Master System, Amiga, Atari ST, C64 - 1991)

Core was all about the 16-bits by this point, but its belly-bashing, boulder-bunging caveman still hit just about every system from Game Boy to Acorn Archimedes. No major gameplay surprises, but another win for personality and platforming prowess. A half-naked, gawping hero with a chin like a fridge, rescuing his wife from "Gary Gritter the local weirdo"? They don't make 'em like that any more.



3 Soulstar

(Mega-CD - 1994)

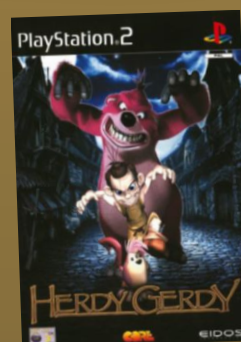
Core's shift from platform game experts to technical necromancers most likely started with its support for this Mega Drive add-on. Ports of older games led to brand new adrenaline-pumping 3D affairs, including mech FPS *Battlecorps* and this startlingly ambitious shooter, the spawn of *Afterburner* and *R-Type*. It was all very impressive, but relegated to obscurity by no one actually buying the Mega-CD.



4 Fighting Force

(PC, N64, PS1 - 1997)

Beat-'em-ups took a gut punch or two during their shift to polygons, but by 1997 Core had shown real 3D gameplay chops and faced the challenge more readily than most. *Fighting Force*'s barrel-scraping character designs hinted that the top ideas people were on the other team, but the game was still a satisfying swing at bringing *Final Fight* into the future of fisticuffs. Or *Streets of Rage*, given that it was originally pitched to Sega as *SOR4*.



5 Herdy Gerdy

(PS2 - 2002)

Along with *Project Eden*, this was an attempt to get Core noticed again in the PS2 era. A 3D platformer with *Lemmings*-esque puzzles to suit its star - a boy called Gerdy who was, er, good at herding - it had truly lovely visuals, but a premise shakier than *Shakin' Stevens* sitting on a washing machine, and gameplay that felt unfinished. Sadly, little else of note came out of the once-great Core (who remembers *Smart Bomb* or *Free Running*?) before the end.

SIX OF THE BEST...

BRITISH HEROES

Off to thwart evil, back in a tick,
put the kettle on, two sugars

V

illains. Scruffy gangsters or smooth-talking, serpentine diplomats. That's how us Brits tend to turn up in games and films, with the dubious bonus of British accents attached to a rogues' gallery of dragons and dark lords. Oh, and Wheatley. So it's nice to remind ourselves that

while we might be world leaders at scheming and chicanery, we do alright at rustling up the odd champion too. Lady Lara rules the roost, but digital Brit big-shots have been around since the early '80s, and live on today in the likes of Jacob and Evie Frye, and the uptight knights of *The Order: 1886*. Oddly, the balance has shifted so that UK protagonists now tend to emerge from North American teams, while we design our own stars for international appeal. But hey, whatever keeps us in the game... ■

MINER WILLY

Manic Miner
(Spectrum, C64, CPC, BBC - 1983)
Surbiton spelunker Willy took on dual UK stereotypes, from working class labourer in *Manic Miner* to tipsy hob-nobber in *Jet Set Willy*. Spontaneous space explorer in *JSW II*: not quite so easily relatable.



THE NAVVIE

The Chaos Engine
(PC, Amiga, Atari ST, SNES, Mega Drive - 1993)

No-nonsense node activator and bane of steampunk supercomputers, this hardcase was the toughest of a six-pack of nameless 16-bit action icons, also including the Thug and the Brigand.



CAMMY WHITE

Super Street Fighter II
(Arcade - 1993)

Dudley's a nice enough bloke, while Eagle and Birdie have technically been around longer, but evergreen Special Forces aggro girl Cammy is unlikely to be dethroned as queen of British brawlers any time soon.



CPT. JOHN PRICE

COD 4: Modern Warfare
(PC, Mac, PS3, 360 - 2007)

Proof that something as simple as generous facial fuzz and a floppy hat can immortalise a man, recurring SAS fave Pricey found his calling as a traitor-thrashing Cockney maverick on the fields of *Modern Warfare*.





CATE ARCHER

No One Lives Forever
(PC, Mac, PS2 - 2000)

Gaming hasn't yet found much use for the Swinging '60s. But even if all we get is crime-fighting style icon and superspy Cate, ruining the day of those terrorist arsebiscuits at H.A.R.M., we'll have done alright.

IGNATIUS BLACKWARD

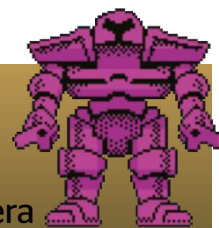
Nightmare Creatures
(PC, PS1, N64 - 1997)

Left field choice from a game a bit like Bloodborne's granddad. Facing a tide of evil in 1834 London, this hard-man of faith bisected zombies with a sweep of his staff and a yell of "PRIESTACULAR!" (last part not true).

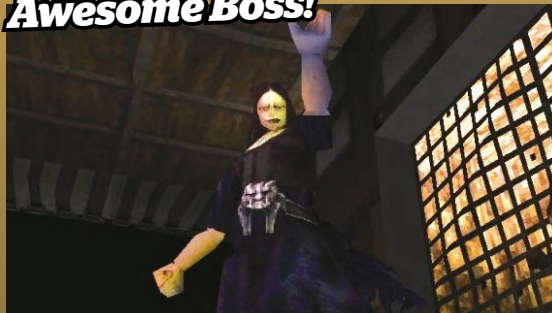


Grab Bag

Retro gems from every era



Awesome Boss!



Tenchu: Stealth Assassins

Format PS1 **Developer** Acquire **Released** 1998

Demon ninja Onikage wasn't all that hard to knock down, thanks to his wretched insistence on trying to kick you to death. But he was big on perseverance and personality. Weird-ass laughing ninja murderer personality. Unlike his boss Mei-oh, Onikage proved harder to actually kill than Steven Seagal, returning like a sulphuric smell in later games to kick you about a bit more.

Classic Moment!



Sacred Armour Of Antirad

Format Spectrum, C64, CPC **Developer** Palace **Released** 1986

A game where your offensive capabilities are limited to lobbing rocks: rubbish. Thankfully, Antirad saw this and added a gritty post-nuclear backstory (in comic book format) and a clanking great power suit that could be kitted out with anti-grav boots and lasers. Find that suit, get your skinny tribal buttocks into it and watch the readout panel flare into life for 8-bit good times.

Remake Request!



Ribbit King

Format PS2, GameCube **Developer** JamsWorks **Released** 2003

Very Japanese game about frof, which is of course golf with a frog instead of a ball. If you still need more reasons why there should be a modern remake with slightly tidied-up mechanics, well, we don't know what to say to you. Other than *frog-in!* (Also, the frogs sit on catapults so you don't actually mash them with your hammer. It's fine. Honest. Probably.)

CultureMaster

The Outer Regions Of Gaming!

The trickiest bit of Alex Kong's Mario and Bowser was nailing details and dimensions. There wasn't a mushroom for error.



WE'VE GOT THE NEED FOR BEADS

Perler bead professionals **Richie Pennington**, **Alex Kong**, **Nick Galilei**, and **Johan Karlgren** steer us through the creation of our very own Pikachu



We've been feeling creative. Dangerously so. It's probably too much time on the internet and not enough gaming. But how to channel this urge to will things into existence? Instagram has the

answer. Perler or Hama beads are being used by creative souls all over the world to breathe life into gaming pixel art. It's time to get crafty.

"Videogame pixels are so effective to recreate with Perler beads as you are essentially using the same square template, one being digital, the other physical," explains one half of Perlermutations on Instagram, Richie Pennington. "I find the classic 8- or 16-bit characters are most effective. The simplicity is its charm and everyone can appreciate the nostalgia they bring. You can't go wrong!" We'll see about that.

Our shopping list includes 10,000 Hama beads, five pegboards, and a stack of ironing paper. The plan is to create a work of art on the pegboard before carefully ironing the beads together, fusing the plastic into place. But it seems we've already made a rookie mistake. "Buy

assorted beads," warns Johan Karlgren from Sweden, whose creations include the pictured Luigi and Zelda pieces. "If you have to start separating before you can start beading it really kills the creative feel." Oh.

Bead to know

As for what to create, the experts have one tip for noobs: keep it simple. "Look for 8-bit GameBoy games as they have effective, simple patterns to work from," suggests Pennington. "Sometimes game developers, working with limitations of the hardware of the time, were inspired to be even more creative with the characters." Also recommended are sprites without too much detail. "Start with small characters that have fewer colours. Mega Man and Mario come to mind," adds Nick Galilei from Ohio. "I would also mention not to rush through the process. Lay down your beads at a steady pace, always referencing the sprite to make sure it's correct."

We decide on an 8-bit Pikachu, find a reference pic online... and are faced with picking through the bucket for yellow and black beads. It's hell, although things speed up by organising the colours on a plate and then moving the beads to the pegboard with tweezers.

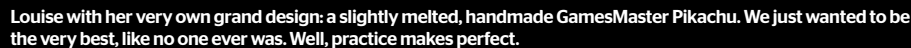
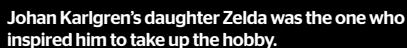
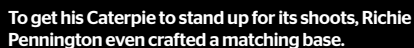


Nick Galilei combs antique shops for canvases to "re-purpose with retro game goodness".

While it becomes beautifully relaxing to watch the electric mouse gradually form on the pegboard, we wonder how long the more impressive creations take. "It really is dependent on size and detail," says the other half of Perlermutations, Alex Kong, who's responsible for the Mario and Bowser above. "The smallest pieces can take 10-15 minutes, and medium 45 minutes to an hour. Larger pieces can take in excess of two hours."

For Pennington, it's character planning that takes the longest. "Once you have your design ready, the pieces don't take too long to make," he says. "You can knock a few great characters out in an afternoon, then go and take some photos while the sun's still out. The more advanced the videogame, the bigger the designs start to

"WE CHOOSE PIKACHU - THEN HAVE TO SPEND AGES SORTING YELLOW AND BLACK BEADS"



We 'get a feel for the iron' by cranking it up to linen settings and positioning the ironing paper over Pikachu. Constantly moving the iron steadily over the beads for ten seconds, we check to see if they have fused by gently pulling off the paper. Some still separate so we iron for another ten. This time, the paper comes away happily and we leave Pikachu for a few seconds to cool before

Now it's finished, we need to find somewhere to take Pikachu for a photoshoot, but the pros have better ideas. "The setting of photographs is important; a real-life scenario that recreates the videogame environment," says Pennington. "It can turn a simple creation into a really fun piece of art. We've had a great time setting up our Pokémon all around town, finding where our versions of Kanto are hiding. We've had funny looks from passers-by!" Ultimately, after an hour, we have an only-slightly-melted real life Pikachu without the electric shocks, *and* a good excuse to occasionally bring the iron out of the cupboard. Towerfall's Sprites are surely only a matter of days away. ■ **Louise Blain**

See this!

Check out more from the Perler pros over on Instagram at @pappasparlor, @nickgalliei and @perlermutations.



The wonderful world of Japan's gaming creations



The world's first Pokémon Gym has opened up in Osaka to let budding trainers do their thing. Amongst a slew of attractions, you can take on Charizard in a 'Battle Colosseum' and earn special Pokémon for X, Y, Alpha Sapphire, and Omega Ruby.



What has Resi been missing all these years? Yes, a musical. A production of Biohazard The Stage is now running in Roppongi, which incorporates fully-choreographed zombie dancing. Head to the official Twitter @Bio_stage to see some enthusiastic rehearsal photos.



To celebrate Mario's 30th year, department store Takashimaya is selling New Year food in Nintendo-themed bento boxes. Priced at 27,000 yen (£149!) the set comes with official Ninty cards. International shipping isn't available, sadly.

CheatMaster

The **Biggest Games Taken Apart!**



Format PS4, XO, PC Publisher Bethesda Softworks Developer Bethesda Game Studios ETA Out now

CONQUER THE COMMONWEALTH

Tips and tricks for **Fallout 4** to help you set the world on fire

1 Hacked off

In our world of cyber incursions and hacktivist collectives, it can seem as though computer security is an arcane and mysterious subject. Turns out it's actually a doddle, since the hacking system in Bethesda's latest is largely unchanged from Fallout 3 and, as such, is still easily exploitable. Simply cross your fingers and pick three potential passwords at random. Although you can only make four incorrect guesses before you're temporarily locked out of a terminal, your tally can be reset by just exiting and re-entering the terminal screen, so you're free to guess with abandon. Or just get companion Nick Valentine to hack for you.

2 Perk up

Each level earns you a point that can either be spent on a perk, or on upgrading one of your SPECIAL attributes - so, even if you start the game as a loathsome dullard, you may very well end the campaign as a silver-tongued brainbox. As for perks, would-be cat burglars should note that upgrading lockpicking or hacking requires at least four points in your perception and intelligence stats, respectively.

4 Living legend

Once you've sunk a few dozen hours into exploring the Commonwealth, you're probably going to begin ignoring just about any item that doesn't have a spiffy little star beside its name. These legendary drops combine solid stats with additional bonuses, and can even be upgraded at a settlement if you have the parts. Righteous Authority, for instance, is a unique laser rifle that can be earned early in the game by hanging out with the Brotherhood Of Steel, and it provides a hefty bonus to critical hit damage that's especially handy in a pinch. Ambitious vault-dwellers should also note that playing on harder difficulties will increase the chance of legendary drops, so stockpile those Stimpacks and give Hard a go.

5 With a little help from my friends

The companion system may not always showcase the virtues of Bethesda's creaking technology, as Dogmeat clips into a floor or Deacon disregards your stealthy approach in favour of a sledgehammer rampage. However, max out your relationship with a buddy and you'll unlock a unique perk that provides a permanent boost to your character, even if you ditch them later.

3 VATS amore

Although the gunplay of Fallout 4 has been improved to the point that it's perfectly playable as a real-time shooter, the Vault-Tec Assisted Targeting System provides plenty of advantages for higher level players. The Penetrator perk, for example, lets you fire through cover using it, and Mysterious Stranger grants a chance whenever you're in VATS to summon a deadly gunslinger to dispatch your foes.

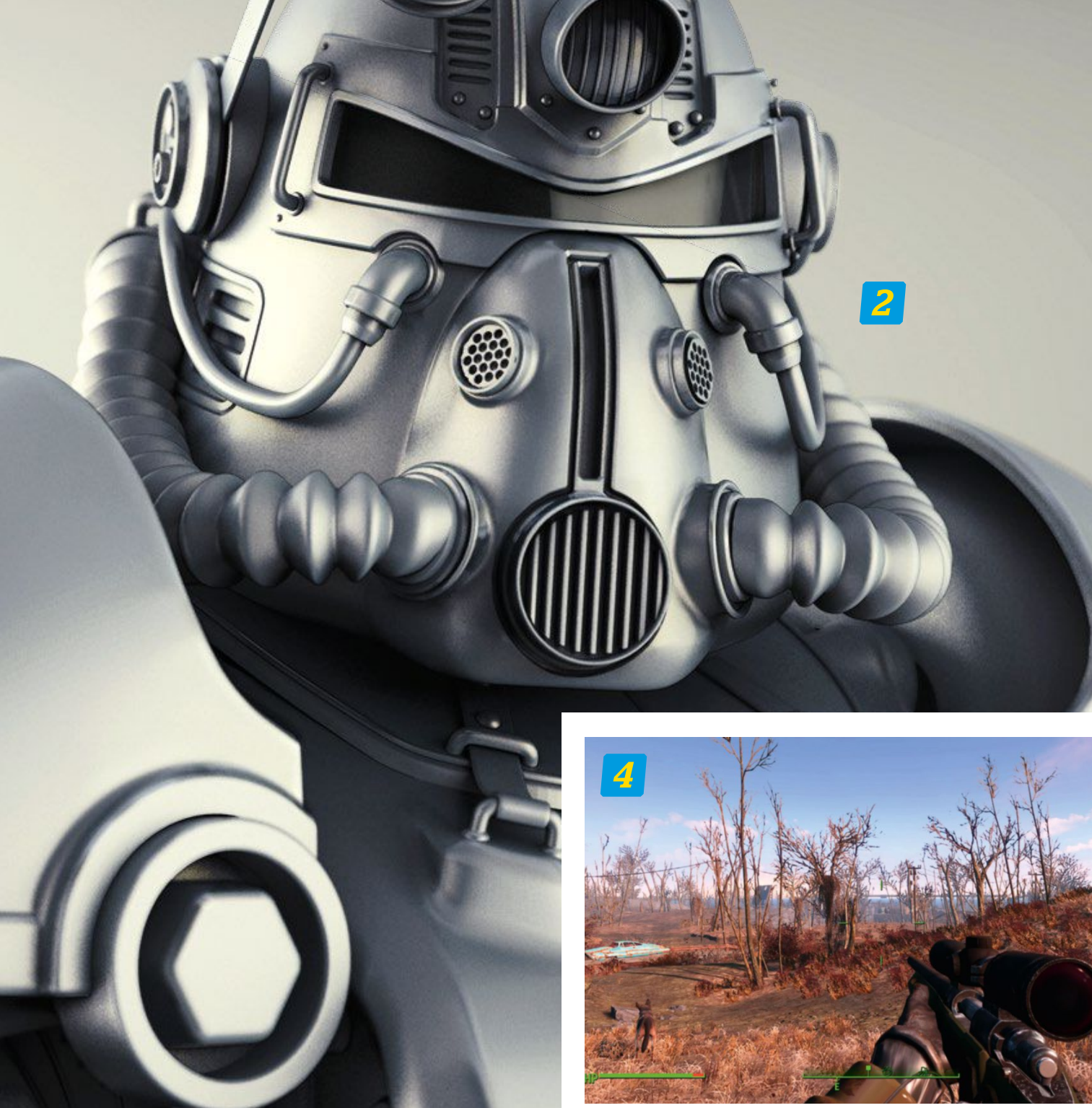


6 This charming man

Speech has seen something of an overhaul in Fallout 4, and opportunities to persuade, intimidate, or otherwise influence your fellow Bay Staters are now presented in the form of colour-coded dialogue options. Yellow denotes an easy-sell or a subtle white lie, while orange suggests a bigger fib. You'll need to be one charismatic so-and-so to convince anyone of a red option though, since the crimson highlight is reserved for hard-nosed persuasion and unbelievable untruths. Food, drink, drugs, and apparel can all provide charisma bonuses, so just as in real life, you may want to gorge on booze and narcotics while wearing a silly hat if you hope to be extra persuasive. Or you could simply quicksave the moment you see a colour-coded speech option appear and reload your game if you fail the attempt. It's not exactly the honourable approach, but you are looking at a page called CheatMaster, so don't you judge us.

7 Magpie eye

One of the side-effects of global nuclear annihilation is an awful lot of clutter, but there's plenty of ways to put all that junk to good use. Weapons can be upgraded at workbenches, so you can swap out stocks, barrels, and more in order to eke out a little extra bang for your buck. You can also use your Commonwealth litter to enhance your settlements, piecing together buildings, defences, and decorations.



GM Subscribe

Never Miss An Issue!



CHOOSE YOUR PACKAGE

For all your multiformat needs, subscribe today to the world's most dedicated gaming mag. We have three options to choose from...

PRINT

**Save
34%**

**ANNUAL
SUBSCRIPTION**

£43.00



- It costs less than buying it in the shops!
- There'll be free stuff every issue!
- A copy of **Middle-earth: Shadow Of Mordor** for PS4 or XO!

DIGITAL

**Save
28%**

**ANNUAL
SUBSCRIPTION**

£28.00



- The cheapest way to get your GM!
- Every issue is packed with trailers and videos!
- Download instantly on the day of release!
- You never have to leave the house!

PRINT & DIGITAL

**Save
48%**

**ANNUAL
SUBSCRIPTION**

£54.00



- The best value GM package!
- Every print issue delivered to you!
- Free gifts with every magazine!
- A digital copy for iOS or Android!
- New trailers and videos each month!
- A copy of **Middle-earth: Shadow Of Mordor** for PS4 or XO!

SUBSCRIBE



**BONUS
GAME!**

Get Middle-earth: Shadow Of Mordor
on either PS4 or XO when you
subscribe via print or bundle options!

POWER PLAY

Those blazing eyes, that glowing sword – signs of a warrior energised by the choice to pick up one of our print or bundle subscriptions and receive a free copy of **Middle-earth: Shadow Of Mordor**. There'll be no stopping him now.

SUBSCRIBE ONLINE TODAY...
myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/GMSUBS

Terms & Conditions: Savings compared to buying 13 full priced issues from UK newsstand. This offer is for new UK subscribers paying by Direct Debit only. You will receive 13 issues in a year. Full details of the Direct Debit guarantee are available upon request. If you are dissatisfied in any way you can call us to cancel your subscription at any time and we will refund you for all unmailed issues. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. For full terms and conditions please visit: myfavm.ag/magterms Offer ends: 31/01/16

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



HYPE

AN EDGE LIVE EVENT

JOIN **EDGE** IN LONDON
FOR AN EXCLUSIVE
ONE-DAY CONFERENCE
DEDICATED TO THE
FUTURE OF INTERACTIVE
ENTERTAINMENT

FEATURING

PHIL HARRISON

ALLOY PLATFORM INDUSTRIES

DAVID BRABEN

FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS

MARK BROWN

GAME MAKER'S TOOLKIT

SIMON BYRON

CURVE DIGITAL

PAUL KILDUFF-TAYLOR

MODE 7

KEZA MACDONALD

KOTAKU UK

DAN MARSHALL

SIZE FIVE GAMES

SIMON PARKIN

DEATH BY VIDEO GAME

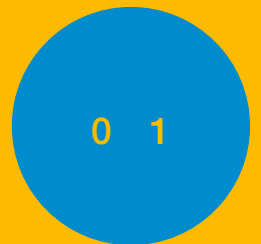
STEVEN POOLE

TRIGGER HAPPY

CASPIAN PRINCE

PUPPYGAMES

+ MORE SPECIAL GUESTS
(SEE SITE FOR DETAILS)



JANUARY 14, HAM YARD HOTEL, LONDON W1D 7DT

TICKETS AVAILABLE NOW WWW.HYPEEVENT.CO.UK



NEXT MONTH...

GamesMaster 299

ON SALE 29 DECEMBER

THE 100 GREATEST GAMES OF 2016

Due to the unpredictable nature of the gaming world, all contents are subject to change.

GAME GUIDE

Your easy, at-a-glance index of what games to get for which machine. These are what we deem the absolute best experiences to pick up right now.

MULTIPLATFORM

1



DARK SOULS

Combining challenge, intrigue, and desolate beauty like nothing before or since. The finest game ever made.

2



GRAND THEFT AUTO V

The most comprehensive and densely-packed sandbox going, full of wonderful distractions and typical Rockstar humour.

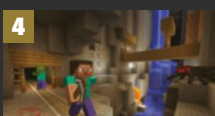
3



THE WALKING DEAD

Some of the greatest interactive storytelling that gaming has to offer - and season two even outdoes the original.

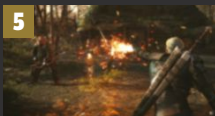
4



MINECRAFT

The phenomenon shows no signs of abating. Far more than just a game, this is a magnificent creative outlet.

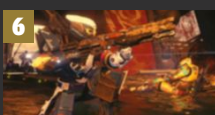
5



THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

An epic proposition that truly lived up to its promise. Vast, mature and engaging - and one of the best fantasy RPGs ever.

6

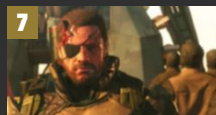


DESTINY: THE TAKEN KING

One year and three chunks of DLC later and Bungie has finally made Destiny the shooter-RPG it was always meant to be.



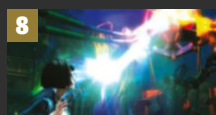
7



METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

Hideo's stunning last hurrah brings open-world action to the revered series.

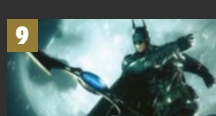
8



BIOSHOCK INFINITE

What a world, what a story, and what a twist. And the original still deserves to be played too, eight years after release.

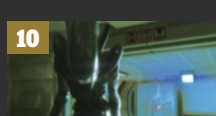
9



BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

Expert storytelling, incredible visuals, and a utility belt full of tricks make this the ultimate superhero fantasy.

10



ALIEN: ISOLATION

Survival horror reinvented. Finally the treatment that the movie deserves, and an experience of remarkable intensity.

11

FAR CRY 4

12

DIABLO III

13

MASS EFFECT 2

14

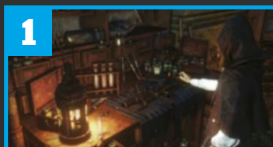
ULTRA STREET FIGHTER IV

15

PORTAL 2

PLAYSTATION 4

1



BLOODBORNE

FromSoft finds the number one spot again with the greatest PS4 exclusive to date. Brilliant, bold, and brutal.

2



TOWERFALL ASCENSION

Still nothing on current-gen has come close to matching the multiplayer thrills found in this arrow-flinging battler.

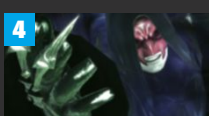
3



THE LAST OF US REMASTERED

Naughty Dog brings all of its strengths to the fore, fusing engaging gameplay with believable, emotive storytelling.

4



FINAL FANTASY XIV: HEAVENSWARD

The MMO on consoles, with extensive new content adding to its appeal.

5



EVERYBODY'S GONE TO THE RAPTURE

An emotional, gorgeous, familiar, and wholly - ahem - enrapturing tale.

6

JOURNEY

7

UNTIL DAWN

8

LITTLEBIGPLANET 3

9

NIDHOGG

10

GALAK-Z: THE DIMENSIONAL

XBOX ONE

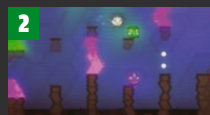
1



HALO 5: GUARDIANS

With a sweeping story and fresh innovations in its hi-octane multiplayer, it's about time to put a ring on it.

2



KALIMBA

An indie hit for Xbox and something completely different, this co-op puzzler is packed with charm and invention.

3



FORZA HORIZON 2

If it's automotive fantasy fulfilment that you crave, then look no further. Horizon's current-gen debut is a sight to behold.

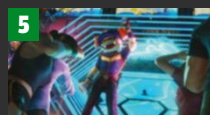
4



TITANFALL

The first big XO exclusive truly delivered, and Respawn's debut is still serving up bombastic multiplayer action.

5



SUNSET OVERDRIVE

Insomniac is back in the groove, bringing forth crazy weapons and an open world bursting with colour and life.

6

ORI & THE BLIND FOREST

7

RARE REPLAY

8

DEAD RISING 3

9

MAX: THE CURSE OF BROTHERHOOD

10

MASSIVE CHALICE

Guilty Pleasure

Team GM comes clean on the games it secretly plays when no-one is watching...



This month, Robin admits to a shameful affair with **Dead Island**

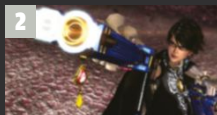
Ok, so it's janky as all hell, utterly tasteless, and terribly written, but I really enjoyed this first-person action-RPG. The thing that made it work for me is, bafflingly, hidden deep in the options menu: analog combat. Switch into this mode and you control melee attacks manually with the sticks, giving every fight a brilliantly tactile feel, and allowing you to target different body parts on the fly. Chopping off a zombie's arms and watching him try to feebly headbutt you to death may not be clever, but it sure is fun.

Wii U



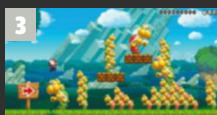
MARIO KART 8

Reinvention is what Nintendo does best, and nowhere is that more apparent than in this party-fuelling karter reborn.



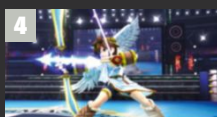
BAYONETTA 2

Proof that every so often more of the same isn't a bad thing at all. Everything good about the first, but better.



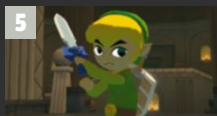
SUPER MARIO MAKER

The most brilliantly accessible level creation game around, dripping with Nintendo's slick signature style.



SUPER SMASH BROS

A perfect sofa-based multiplayer pick. An irresistible line-up, and bursting with modes to bum-bash your buds across.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER HD

Arguably the best Zelda made better, with visuals to make your eyes water.

6 AFFORDABLE SPACE ADVENTURES

7 SPLATOON

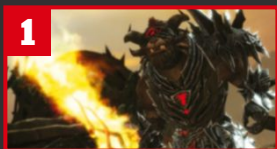
8 EARTHBOUND

9 HYRULE WARRIORS

10 PIKMIN 3



PC



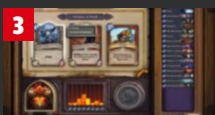
GUILD WARS 2

Still the benchmark for PC MMOs. No subs fee, and a vast, storied world constantly updated with new stuff.



TOTAL WAR: ATTILA

The kings of RTS have outdone themselves with this latest nomadic take on the warfaring formula.



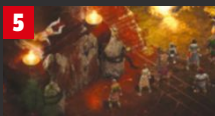
HEARTHSTONE

Try and walk away from it. We dare you. Blizzard has given the collectible card game genre an accessible shot in the arm.



ELITE: DANGEROUS

Utterly unique. No other game out there gives you the chance to carve your own path through as massive a universe.



PILLARS OF ETERNITY

Bringing back the halcyon days of Infinity Engine-powered RPGs, only with modern visuals and a fresh fantasy setting.

6 DOTA 2

7 THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

8 KERBAL SPACE PROGRAM

9 ENDLESS LEGEND

10 HER STORY

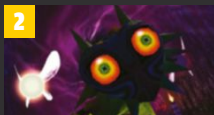


3DS



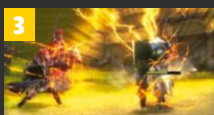
POKÉMON X/Y

The move to 3D has only improved this classic series, which has never been in better form. Get your trade face on.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK 3D

A masterpiece from the past reworked to hit the hardcore and still be approachable.



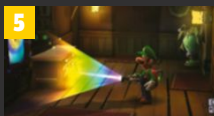
FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING

Play this with permadeath switched on and you're in for a generation-spanning heartbreaker like no other.



XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 3D

Nintendo does the impossible, bringing a vast and glorious open world to its diddy dual-screener. Witchcraft, surely...



LUIGI'S MANSION 2

Bubbling over with personality, this long-awaited sequel is still the pinnacle of puzzling on your 3DS. Yello?

6 MONSTER HUNTER 4 ULTIMATE

7 ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF

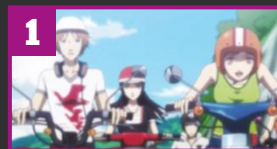
8 SUPER SMASH BROS

9 SUPER MARIO 3D LAND

10 PROF LAYTON VS PHOENIX WRIGHT



PS VITA



PERSONA 4 GOLDEN

Never been to Japanese high school? Then this stylish JRPG can help correct that. Only with demons and murders.



VELOCITY 2X

For those with the need for speed, this is the way to go. Frantic running and gunning perfectly distilled.



ZERO ESCAPE: VIRTUE'S LAST REWARD

The current king of the crop in terms of Vita's visual novel renaissance.



GRIM FANDANGO

It's back from the grave! You'll laugh. You'll cry. You'll steal more bread of the dead than you could possibly need.



FEZ

Bright, beautiful, and inventive – and perfectly suited to handheld. Creative exploration that doesn't get old.

6 HOTLINE MIAMI 2: WRONG NUMBER

7 TEARAWAY

8 STEINS;GATE

9 FINAL FANTASY X/X-2 REMASTER

10 GRAVITY RUSH



GAMESMASTER CHRISTMAS CRACKERS

The GM Christmas issue comes but once a year, and company guidelines insist that it should be a volume of goodwill and cheer. Unfortunately, we're down on our cheer quota this year, so we've resorted to padding out the back page with that most prestigious brand of comedy: the Christmas cracker joke.

So sit yourself down under the mistletoe with a bowl of figgy pudding and a glass of tepid Baileys to enjoy our handpicked selection of yuletide gaming gags. Guaranteed to make you laugh like an especially festive drain. Or, more likely, groan with seasonal despair. Happy holidays!

Q What do you call a tongue-tied Ryo Hazuki?

A A Shenmute

Q What's City 17's leading investment bank?

A Freeman Brothers

Q What's Hyrule's favourite social network?

A LinkedIn

Q What does Master Chief call his mum and dad?

A His guardians

Q Why wouldn't the Super Mutant ride the rollercoaster?

A He was scared he'd Fallout

Q Why does Toad get invited to every Mushroom Kingdom party?

A He's a fun guy

Q Why didn't Mario order the dinner deal?

A He likes the à la kart menu

Q Why did Luke Skywalker throw out his chopsticks?

A He preferred to use the forks

Q Why did Kratos visit the audiologist?

A He couldn't Hera thing

Q Why does Mike Tyson play so much Forza?

A He's an ex-boxer

Q What's Liam Neeson's favourite videogame?

A Tekken



CHILLOUT GAMES

we value your games

www.chilloutgames.co.uk/Sell

review centre



We Pay £££ For Your Games:



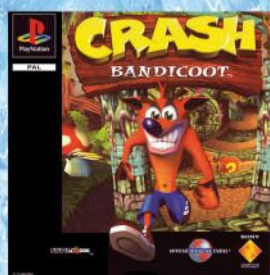
£18.79



£284.80



£23.54



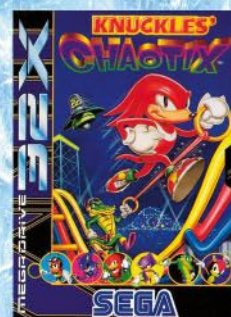
£14.25



£15.57



£34.96



£72.00



£13.55



£15.77



£11.50



£118.18

**-GET GREAT PRICES
-WITH FREE COURIER AND FAST PAYMENT**

Prices valid as at 19th November 2015. Prices subject to change on a daily basis. Chillout Games and retro-games.co.uk are trading names of Chillout Games Ltd. Prices are for shop credit - 12% more than PayPal. T&Cs at www.chilloutgames.co.uk.



SILVER
AVAILABLE FROM

zavvi.com **ShopTo**

GOLD
AVAILABLE FROM

amazon.co.uk



OUT NOW

**THIS IS FOR
THE PLAYERS**

PS4